

Upskill for career success and longevity

Lifelong learning is crucial to personal and company growth, finds [Felicity Landon](#)



Felicity Landon

Let's start with a quote from Henry Ford: "Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at 20 or 80. Anyone who keeps learning stays young."

It's a favourite quote of Roshan Thiran, chief executive of the Leaderonomics Group and a passionate believer that we should never stop learning. "Science proves Henry Ford right – the onset of diseases such as Alzheimer's is significantly reduced if we just spend 20 minutes a day learning something new or challenging our brain," he says. "Learning is a lifelong process. At each stage, even as we mature as leaders and retire, we learn new skills and things to enable us to 'leave a legacy' and transfer our legacy by mentoring, teaching and giving back. We never have a phase in life where we don't need to learn."

Topic: Learning

Keywords: Opportunities, career, education

Background: A willingness to learn keeps someone relevant and effective at what they do, personally and in their career

A study which began in 1986 of a group of nuns, from the US city of Mankato, who outlived many others astonished the world, says Mr Thiran. The key point was that the nuns learnt daily – the research showed how this had a huge impact on extending life expectancy.

"I also believe that if we keep learning, we make ourselves luckier. Many times, I have personally uncovered an 'opportunity' because I have learnt something. For example, I read a book a few years ago about the power of the digital world. As I uncovered numerous nuggets of wisdom from the book, I started to see numerous business opportunities for 'Leaderonomics' in the digital space. I quickly assembled a team to work with me to start building a digital learning business and a digital content library. Each of these new initiatives would have never been uncovered if I had not been personally learning."

Mr Thiran says he has always advocated for companies morphing into learning organisations. "When one person in the company learns, others can learn off him. If everyone in the organisation is

learning daily and continuing to grow themselves personally, the cumulative effect tends to enable such organisations to be vibrant with new ideas, innovations and a continuously growing organisation."

CHECK FOR UPDATES

Bill Jones, professor of lifelong learning at the Universities Association for Lifelong Learning (UALL) in the UK, says: "Continued learning is extremely important for everybody, all the time. Obviously, there is progression within a career; in quite a lot of cases, people that come to us have hit the ceiling in their career and to get further they need further qualifications. There is a general truth that to progress through a career or an industry it is extremely important to make the best of your opportunities. Second, the changing world around us means that we need continuous 'updating'. I should imagine there is no area of Institute-related activity where things are static and no area safe from the need to be ahead of the curve."

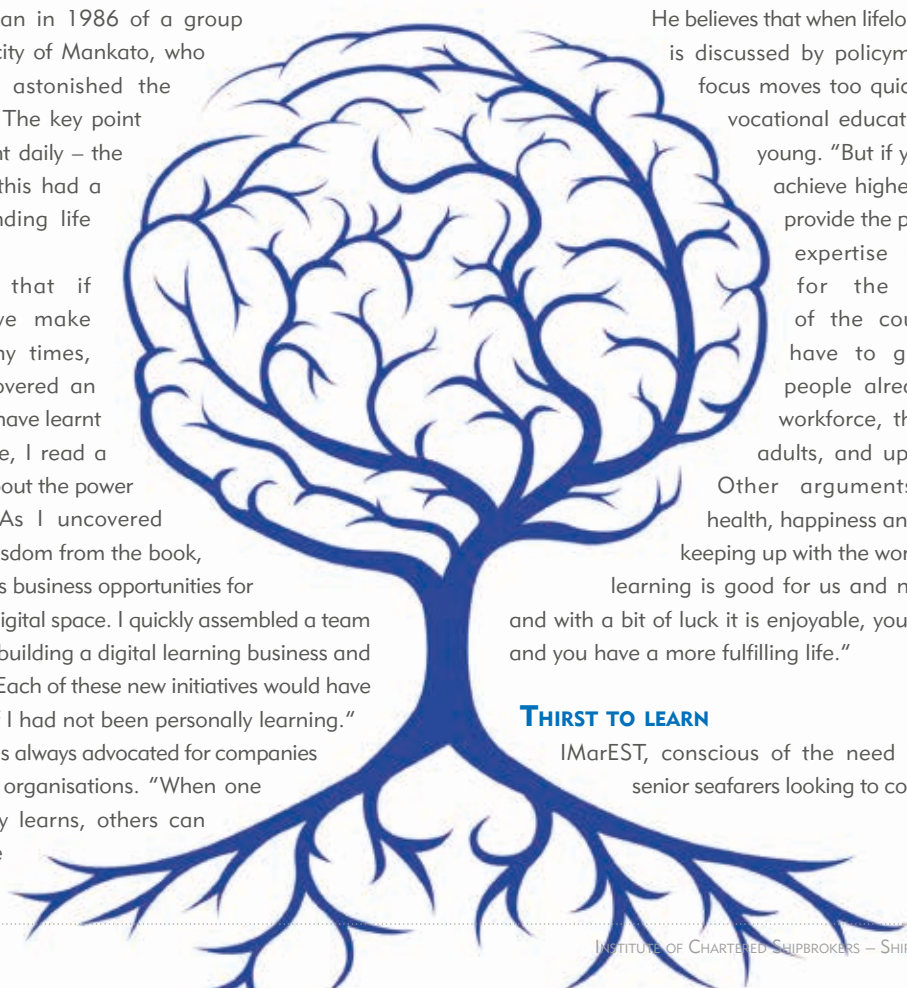
There is plenty of evidence, says Mr Jones, that both physical and mental wellbeing are improved if you keep learning. "It won't stop you getting Alzheimer's but it will certainly mean that if you do get it, you get it later – there is evidence for that."

He believes that when lifelong learning is discussed by policymakers, the focus moves too quickly only to vocational education for the young. "But if you want to achieve higher skills and provide the professional expertise you need for the economy of the country, you have to get to the people already in the workforce, the working adults, and upskill them."

Other arguments include health, happiness and generally keeping up with the world. To keep learning is good for us and necessary – and with a bit of luck it is enjoyable, you feel better and you have a more fulfilling life."

THIRST TO LEARN

IMarEST, conscious of the need to support senior seafarers looking to come ashore,



is continually looking at broader qualifications; transferrable skills are important and can also be an indirect outcome from continued learning, says Alan Campion, independent consultant at minus161 Consulting.

Continued learning shouldn't be just a narrow requirement to carry out something as a condition of being a member here or employee there, he says. "It is beneficial in a much wider sphere, for both the person learning and the employer. It also shows that you are making some sort of effort to remain current with whatever is happening in your own industry and the surrounding industries that affect it."

Mr Thiran says we should definitely be learning skills that are related to what we are trying to achieve, that is to say our personal vision and mission. "But at the same time, I am also an advocate of breadth – learning about a variety of fields can benefit a person in many ways. In fact, it can lead to innovation and borrowing ideas from a completely different field."

He reads a couple of books a month on topics that he would 'never be interested in or have passion for', as this enables him to 'connect the dots' and have a broad overview of all the elements of the world.

He concludes: "Continuous learning comes through reading, observing, listening, experimenting, reflecting and learning from things that are happening around you, good or bad. Lack of learning deems

a person obsolete. A constant willingness and thirst to learn keeps someone relevant, innovative and, indeed, effective at what they do, personally and in their career." **SN**



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Putting education into practice

Alan Campion, independent consultant at minus161 Consulting, embarked on a teaching career after 35 years at sea, mostly in engineering positions, on passenger vessels, oil tankers, and gas carriers.

"After 12 months of teaching, most of what I was doing was professional development courses," he says. "This was mainly parts of a master's degree and other development for people onboard looking to consolidate and build their knowledge.

"I realised very soon that it doesn't matter how much knowledge you have personally, it isn't just a matter of transferring it into other people's brains – it is much better when you put them in a position where they learn rather than you just teach. I aimed to run my courses in a way that when people left, instead of thinking 'I know everything', they left knowing there is so much to learn, and have a thirst to learn more.

"Giving them sufficient information to pass the assessment to show they have successfully completed the course is one thing. It gives people the underpinning knowledge and background. But just as important is to send them off with the information as to where the best places are to find any information – especially with easy access to the Internet, there is so much misinformation out there."

Mr Campion is a fellow of the Institute of Marine Engineering, which has moved to formalise records of CPD.

And what happens if we stop learning? He refers to the 'Peter principle', a management theory formulated by Laurence J. Peter which concluded that in any hierarchy, every person will eventually reach their own level of incompetence. The idea is based on the idea that a person's potential for promotion is often based on their performance in their current job. This eventually takes them to their highest level of competence, and then to a role in which they are not competent, thus reaching their career's ceiling.

"That theory is based to a great extent on people doing their initial learning – for example, a degree – and then getting a job in a large organisation and, as long as they are good at their job, being promoted," he says. "Therefore, they end up doing a job which they are not actually very good at. Continuous learning is one of the tools that can be used to prevent that sort of thing happening."

There is, however, a danger that you can learn more and more specialist things, ending up with such niche knowledge that it has very limited viability, he says. What, then, should we be learning? "You might know enough to be able to perform in the industry but you haven't enough experience to know what else you need to know; that is where a good supervisor or mentor can help you to progress in the right direction." **SN**

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