Lifelong learning key to success

Professional development is a continuing practice of lifelong learning. Updating skills, specialization, and retraining are all part of professional development, which is a requirement for some professionals, and a choice for others.

“Professional development is important to B.C.’s competitiveness, both in the short- and long-term,” said Ian Lagasse, national account director for the Pacific region at Canadian Management Centre. “Clearly, the benefits associated with a highly skilled workplace are felt, among other things, in higher productivity and higher levels of employee engagement.”

Sally Halliday, managing director of program outreach and counselling services at the UBC Life & Career Centre in downtown Vancouver, says she sees a lot of people who are going through a career change or thinking about a change.

She says many people transitioning into leadership roles need new skills to manage people and improve communication. “A workshop called How to Deal with Difficult People is a popular one,” she laughs.

Workshops like Building a Resilient Career have been a popular choice over the summer. People signing up for professional development programs during summer holidays are a true sign of the times, Halliday says.

During the recession, Halliday says she’s noticed something unexpected — people are still thinking of leaving their jobs. It’s a risk, but a recession seems to be a catalyst to make a change, she says. “People really think about what matters most to them.”

Halliday says that an economic downturn is actually a good time to retrain and upgrade your skills, to position yourself for when things turn around. “True job security comes from knowing who you are and what you have to offer,” she said. “And be flexible.”

Teachers have regularly taken part in professional development and currently in B.C., they get five days throughout the school year to update their skills.

“As research and knowledge changes, what are the best practices and how do we keep integrating these practices?” says Kanwal Neel, associate director of professional programs of the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University.

Neel says a couple of trends he has seen are in the areas of literacy, numeracy, technology and social responsibility.

“How to infuse new technology and acknowledging diversity of people through special education training are common interests for educators,” said Neel.

Starting this year, lawyers in B.C. are the first in Canada to have a professional development requirement and must put in 12 hours each year. “As in other professions like doctors and nurses, there are always changes, said Alan Treleavan, director of education and practice of the Law Society of British Columbia. “For lawyers, these are changes in the law and how it is practised, and the use of new technology.”

As for popular courses for lawyers, Treleavan says they are often those that are “the most suited to the law that they practice.”

Professional ethics is also a popular area for professional development, he says, because lawyers often have to deal with difficult ethical decisions.

“In today’s rapidly changing business environment, lifelong learning is a must!” says Lagasse.