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Laurie Joslin

FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT, UNLIMITED COACHING SOLUTIONS

"If you're not continuously learning, you may as well die," according to Laurie Joslin of Unlimited Coaching Solutions. Joslin believes that life-long learning is as essential to living as breathing. "When people stop learning, they fail to exercise their mental muscles. They become complacent in their attitudes, and they become less open to new ideas and experiences."

Joslin stresses that life-long learning takes many forms, from reading a book, listening to an audiobook, watching a videotape, taking a classroom or online course, to working with a coach or a mentor.

"A mentor helps a person to grow and learn," Joslin says. "Mentors don't tell mentees what to do, but they show by example. Sometimes, mentors might play the role of a coach where they ask appropriate questions to allow mentees to discover on their own. At other times, mentors might play the role of teacher where they're actually teaching some skills."

Joslin recommends finding a mentor by "looking in your own backyard at the people who have influenced you then simply asking someone if he or she would be your mentor." Joslin suggests defining in advance the mentor/mentee relationship,

so you can tell the person your expectations for the relationship.

"Lay out for the person what you're looking for," Joslin advises. For example, maybe you just want to meet your mentor for a cup of coffee every other week to pick the person's brain on certain topics. Or perhaps you'd like to have email or telephone access to the person to ask a question now and then. If you don't set such parameters, the prospective mentor might think that the relationship will be too much of a commitment.

"People naturally enjoy helping someone in this kind of relationship, and it's beneficial for both parties" Joslin says. Mentees benefit because they're learning from real-life examples, and they're experiencing individualized, one-on-one attention. Mentors find satisfaction in giving back, in sharing what they've learned—maybe the hard way—and in helping someone else progress in a career and in life.

"It's important to reach out and ask for a mentor and ask for help," Joslin says. "We'll make enough mistakes on our own, why not learn from someone else's mistakes. And it's amazing how many people will say 'Yes!'" ●

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Ray Patterson

PRESIDENT/OWNER, CAPITAL CONSULTING GROUP

Ray Patterson always believed the traditional learning paradigm—you go to school, you get your degree, you get a job, and you work the rest of your life.

“At the beginning, I didn’t realize the benefits of life-long learning,” Patterson says. “I was certainly interested in expanding my horizons. I felt proficient in what I was already doing as a division-level manager at the Watervliet Arsenal, but I wanted to do more. Therefore, I felt I needed to know more to be able to do more.”

That need to know more led Patterson to enroll in the Executive Master’s of Business Administration (EMBA) degree program at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York. Early in the program, Patterson experienced a paradigm shift to twenty-first-century thinking: “I realized that if you’re not constantly applying the current skills you have but also acquiring the new skills you need, you become obsolete very quickly.” That realization ignited in Patterson a thirst for life-long learning.

Patterson exemplified his newfound wisdom during every-other-weekend visits made by his two sons from his first marriage, who were in middle school at the time. “I reminded them to bring their homework, because Dad had to study, too,” Patterson recalls. Studying together meant that Patterson could discuss with his sons what he was learning; in turn, his sons

shared with Patterson what they were learning. Patterson also extolled the benefits of life-long learning. “When they entered high school, they had entirely different study habits than they had in elementary and middle school,” Patterson says. “They have continued life-long learning to this day, because they understand that you don’t stop learning. You keep incorporating what you learn every day whether it be from formal education or informal experiences.”

Once Patterson attained his EMBA—the first person in his family to earn a master’s degree—the horizons he thought he would be expanding turned into vistas. “The degree opened my eyes to much broader possibilities for myself, including the tools to evaluate my career, my job, and my life,” Patterson says. That led Patterson to explore with senior leaders at the Arsenal his desire to do something more.

“The frankness of that conversation opened up some other opportunities within the Defense Department with the support of my senior leadership,” Patterson says. “They helped me pursue some goals within the Defense Department but outside the Arsenal, which further expanded my learning opportunities.” Subsequently, Patterson left federal service and moved first to industry and academia and then to his own company, Capital Consulting

Group, which helps client companies not only understand change and but also create change for strategic advantage.

Not surprisingly, Patterson continues his pursuit of life-long learning through reading books (management topics are his favorite), attending seminars and educational sessions, examining models and tools from today's "thought leaders," and taking time to reflect to determine how he can incorporate the knowledge he acquires. "That is very attractive to my clients because they're not only interested in what

I know today that can help them but they're also very interested in what I will find out tomorrow that will help them," Patterson says.

From Patterson's perspective, success requires "envisioning for ourselves our own world-class view of where we want to be ultimately, taking stock of where we are, then building the bridge and the action plan to move forward." A major component of that action plan, according to Ray Patterson, is life-long learning. ●

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Jim Ullery

**PRESIDENT & OWNER, CENTER FOR ORGANIZATIONAL ENERGY,
FRANCHISEE OF CRESTCOM INTERNATIONAL'S BULLET PROOF MANAGER**

Research estimates that 60 percent of tomorrow's jobs will require skills that only 20 percent of today's workers possess. Research also estimates that the average person leaving college today will change careers 14 times. Therefore, school can never be out, according to Jim Ullery, president and owner of Center for Organizational Energy (<http://www.energyseekers.com>).

"Without a lifetime of learning, education, training, and retraining opportunities for everyone, we will not meet these twenty-first-century challenges," Ullery says. "Life-long learning opportunities are vital to ensuring that communities retain their competitive edge in the global economy and that every community—be it a nation, a company, an industry, a for-profit or not-for-profit organization—can participate in its community's success."

"Community" is the operative word in Ullery's philosophical approach to life-long learning. "When an employee is part of a community that has a purpose—as defined by the company's mission, goals, and objectives—and it connects to the individual's purpose, the employee feels a part of the community's higher purpose," Ullery says.

Ullery assists in building this sense of community as a franchisee of Crestcom International's Bullet Proof Manager, a measured development program presented in 54 countries and translated into more than 24 languages. The program consists of the world's best presenters addressing an

array of leadership topics through video and live presentations. Topics include motivating others, delivering good customer service, planning and goal setting, managing change, listening and speaking skills, coaching and mentoring, negotiating, understanding stress management, recruiting and hiring. Two topics are presented each month, and participants create action plans for the implementation of each month's topics.

"Since the design of the program is incremental doses over a long period of time, the success comes from the regularity with which participants build and apply their newfound knowledge," Ullery says.

Applying the knowledge gained through the program contributes to the sense of community within an organization. Ullery believes that one of the greatest reasons that employees fail in organizations is that they are not allowed to become a part of the very community that would ensure their success. When managers become too busy to spend any time with staff, employees disconnect from the organization's higher purpose. Not so in companies that embrace Bullet Proof Manager.

"The employer discovers that a graduate of Bullet Proof Manager is a results-focused leader who has not only learned but is also teaching to others the skills he or she learned," Ullery says.

In doing so, a community is built, life-long learning is fostered, and the company maintains its competitive edge in the twenty-first century. ●

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John S. Pocorobba

**VICE PRESIDENT—OPERATIONS,
EINHORN YAFFEE PRESCOTT ARCHITECTURE & ENGINEERING, P.C.**

Creativity and knowledge sharing will be the fuel that sustains our journey," according to the vision statement of Einhorn Yaffee Prescott Architecture & Engineering, P.C. (EYPAE), a professional services firm with five offices located around the country. The desire to share the firm's collective knowledge throughout the organization led to the creation of EYP/U—Corporate Education and Training.

This in-house education program provides focused offerings in areas of design expertise as well as general offerings in areas such as communication, leadership, project delivery, computer technology, and liberal arts. EYPAE also reaches out for external training by hosting an on-site Toastmaster International club and welcoming vendors such as Dale Carnegie and others for technical topics.

"We want to spur this culture of learning and self-improvement to drive higher levels of success for individuals in their careers as well as for the organization," according to John S. Pocorobba, Vice-President of Operations in the Albany, NY office. "EYP/U also speaks to some of our core values as an organization committed to life-long learning and self-improvement."

The commitment to life-long learning benefits the firm in numerous ways, according to Pocorobba. EYPAE is able to cultivate a knowledgeable workforce overall,

build strong talent pipelines internally, attract and retain talent, and develop additional in-depth expertise to offer to clients.

"We believe that the benefit to the firm is that we build long-term staff. In fact, our turnover ratio has been lower than industry averages," Pocorobba says. "People stay with the firm a long time because of this culture of continuous learning."

The continuous learning enjoyed by employees is documented through Career Development and Performance Appraisal System (CDAPAS).

"In that process, as we discuss a person's goals and performance, we establish at least one goal that's focused on learning activities," Pocorobba says. "That could be a recommendation to attend a specific class or to teach a specific class. The follow-up to that is setting an implementation goal wherein the person strives to implement a technique or apply some of the knowledge gained through a goal set for the next year."

EYPAE also offers a voluntary mentoring program within the firm and a tuition-reimbursement program named the "Prescott Educational Stipend" for learning activities outside the firm such as for specific stand-alone courses or for courses that will apply to advanced degrees.

Clearly, EYPAE is dedicated to its role as a corporate learning community, and

(Continued)

Pocorobba shares the firm's perspective on life-long learning.

"I'm passionate about self-improvement and developing other people," Pocorobba says. "The world changes quickly and as a result, resourcefulness, adaptation, and flexibility become indispensable traits. New technologies, new strategies, and different communication media drive the need to continuously 'raise your game.' I'm a strong believer that each year every single person needs to add more skills to his or her 'tool bag.' Without it, your offering of skills will fall behind your peers. Through application, you'll attain greater performance and reach higher levels of success."

Encouraging employees to reach higher levels of success is a hallmark of EYP/U. The program has also garnered industry recognition. EYP/U—Corporate Education and Training was the 2003 winner of the American Institute of Architects (AIA)/Continuing Education Award for Excellence.

Many companies today are following EYPAE's lead in championing life-long learning. How can you tell whether a prospective employer has a genuine commitment to life-long learning?

"Seeking a job is a two-way dialogue. Companies have needs and are searching for motivated, talented people," Pocorobba says. "But as a job seeker, you need to clarify what is important to you—such as life-long learning—and that requires preparation, confidence, and a proactive approach."

Research a company's Web site for evidence of the organization's support of life-long learning activities. Read the vision statement. Scan archived copies of the

company's strategic plan, annual report, and employee newsletters. Look for details about awards and honors the company has earned for supporting continuing education activities. Click on links to Web site pages related to staff professional development.

During the initial interview, pose probing questions that will help you understand the company's culture and values. Pocorobba recommends asking:

- "What is your approach to continuing education within the industry?"
- What is your approach to continuing education outside the industry?
- "How does continuing education play a role in career advancement in your organization?"
- "How much time and money does your company budget for educational opportunities such as seminars, college courses, and in-house training?"
- "Can you share success stories of individuals entering the organization at the entry level and rising through the ranks to positions of significant responsibility?"

These types of questions will reveal if a company invests in the professional development of its staff.

This proactive approach will give you the information you need to determine if a prospective company is the right one for you. Once you're on the job, document your continuing education activities throughout the year and discuss them during your annual performance review. This will show the company that you, too, share an appreciation of and a commitment for life-long learning. ●