

Key Concepts:

lifelong learning

graduate and professional degrees

refreshing skills

Chapter 13

**Staying in the Game
With Lifelong Learning**

If you're looking at college as something you do for four years (or more) right after high school to check off your "to do" list, you probably need to think again. That's not an assumption you should make in an economic environment that runs on knowledge. As the technological era shows, knowledge changes quickly. What's cutting-edge today is quaint a decade or even a year from now. Good jobs today won't be the same 30 years from now. That's how *your* work future differs so dramatically from your grandparents' and even your parents'.

In the 21st century, you can't count on jobs and skills staying the same. That means you need to plan on actively acquiring new skills and new knowledge throughout your career. If you are to succeed in this rapidly changing, global job market, you have to be committed to *lifelong learning*. That means if new technology or new procedures come along that affect your job, you need to embrace those changes and adapt to the new working environment by always being willing to learn new things. It may not matter whether you learn these innovations in the classroom, on the job or by teaching them to yourself. What definitely matters is that you learn them.

Some professions require that you constantly update

your skills and learn new techniques or protocols. People who work in fields such as nursing, teaching, social work and pharmacy are required to complete a specified number of continuing education credits within a certain number of years. In the many fields that don't require workers to continue their learning and training, those who experience a job interruption often find that their stagnant skills no longer match what is being demanded and rewarded in the marketplace.

If you don't believe us, try asking the hundreds of thousands of manufacturing workers who have lost their jobs over the past decade. Whether in Ohio, North Carolina or any other state, there are horror stories of middle-age workers who had the same job for decades only to see it completely disappear due to technology changes, outsourcing or recession. Lacking skills demanded in today's marketplace, many of these workers have had to take lower-paying jobs.

Others have taken advantage of retraining programs or have returned to school to learn a completely new profession. Think about how difficult it must be for a man who has spent his life as a tool-and-die maker to return to the classroom after 20 years to study to be a nurse. Or how difficult it is for a woman who worked in a textile mill to retrain as a computer technician.

You can insulate yourself from some of that difficulty if you commit now to refreshing your skill set and broadening your knowledge base throughout your work life. We're not saying that a commitment to lifelong learning will protect you from job loss or other disruptions. What it will do is improve the odds that you will be able to bounce back from whatever market upheaval occurs.