



pursuing PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

by Lindsay Tasos, Agriculture
Future of America Intern

IN COLLEGE, TEACHERS AND COUNSELORS GUIDE you to become a successful professional, but what about after graduation? How can you find professional development in the workplace? Continually acquiring skills and knowledge, both for development and for career advancement, is the key to becoming successful in your career path.

“Being part of 4-H and FFA when I was younger and AFA as a college student really helped set the stage to build my networks as I entered the ‘real world,’” said Paul Kirbach, Monsanto’s pre-commercial corn supply planner for the North America Foundation Corn Team. His duties require him to partner with Monsanto’s internal corn brands and licensing organizations to analyze quality. “Because I developed strong networks early in my career, I have a wide variety of colleagues and friends to help, encourage, support and provide perspective as I continue along my career path to my long term development goals.”

GET INVOLVED!

Kirbach said being engaged with professional organizations and peer networks is important to development. Many organizations will offer professional development training through workshops and conferences.

“Organizations help me to build networks in our industry and within my company that I wouldn’t necessarily get from my role alone,” he said. “In addition, these organizations are a great way to gain leadership opportunities early on in a career.”

Rachel Robinson, manager at Osborn Barr, a full-service marketing and communications agency in Kansas City, Missouri, agrees with Kirbach.

“Being a part of professional organizations are extremely beneficial because of the networking and professional development opportunities that they provide,” she said.

Robinson’s duties require her to manage account services with SFP’s products. She is involved in the National AgriMarketing Association, and is a part of the Clay County Farm Bureau Board. She and Kirbach are also members of the Agriculture Future of America Alliance through which they are able to attend different events and seminars for young professionals in agriculture.

“The AFA Alliance is the first place I turn when seeking tools to help me further develop professionally,” said Robinson’s and Kirbach’s fellow Alliance member Matt Gugle. Gugle is the Group Manager for Kice Industries, a family owned industrial air filtration and bulk solids handling company. Gugle oversees the general operation of the group, works on system designs, and manages projects. Besides AFA, Gugle participates in a few industry-specific organizations through Kice. He also looks for organizations that help him network and further his knowledge about his specific career field.

While outside organizations provide a good environment to cultivate new ideas, you don’t always have to leave your co-workers to learn and grow. Professional development opportunities can also be available in the office.

“I find professional development in the job I show up to every day,” said Kirbach. “I am constantly trying to find new and better ways to do my job, and through that I learn so much about our company and our industry.”

You can find professional development anywhere you pursue a career as long as you’re willing to learn. Kirbach said he has gained knowledge and experience by working with and listening to his managers and peers. He has found professional development by going to different trainings and conferences through his job that help him further his skills and career goals.

READ ABOUT IT!

In between different networking events, books are a great way to expand your professional development. Gogle recommends reading *The Speed of Trust* by Stephen Covey and *Firms of Endearment* by Rajendra S. Sisodia. He also reads any industry specific publications so that he can stay up to date on new technology in the industry.

"Most of the literature I read is through recommendations," he said. "As my coworkers attend different seminars at various trade organization meetings we hear about new books or publications and share those with the office. Sometimes we create book clubs and read new books together and discuss how we can adopt ideas from the book and how those could benefit Kice Industries."

If you don't have someone actively suggesting books you should read, Robinson said she believes in finding professional development on your own.

"Everyone should be passionate about their industry and their own professional development and take ownership of knowledge in their industry and their professional development opportunities," she said.

Robinson said she constantly finds beneficial articles on AgCareers.com and agriculture publication websites. She also believes that reading local news and current issues helps advance her growth. For information on agriculture she recommends *Farm Journal*, *AgProfessional* and the AgWeb Newsletter. Robinson also keeps up with social media from pertinent companies to see what opportunities they are talking about.

WATCH IT!

Not everyone enjoys reading a book. Companies and organizations also offer webinars and online videos. Kirbach is involved with the alumni association at his alma mater, the University of Illinois, and various young professional networks. These

connections have provided webinars on everything from setting up a 401(k) to learning about sustainability in agriculture. Kirbach actively seeks out webinar events to help connect him with others with similar agriculture interests.

Robinson also finds webinars through organizations she has joined. She participates in the AFA Alliance webinar series that is offered to the Alliance members

"Attending an AFA webinar will help you gain knowledge about the agriculture industry and they can positively impact your personal and professional development," she said.

Kirbach also suggests Ted.com, which offers lectures by leaders nationwide that you can read and watch. The website is open and free to anyone. Most talks are less than 20 minutes and allow you to access information and insight not available in your regional network. The website also has different suggestions that people post about smart device applications, books and much more that have helped further Kirbach's professional development and education.

Webinars do not have to just be watched alone. Gogle says Kice often utilizes webinars as a companywide continual learning exercise. They have found that they benefit most when they can watch the webinars as a group and then discuss how the information pertains to their business.

"Trade publications are constantly promoting webinars in our industry," he says. "Signing up for publication update emails is always a good way to stay current on up-coming webinars and other internet based training"

From networking with your peers and industry leaders to reading books and blogs to attending live webinars and watching recordings, professional development opportunities are all around you.

ADVICE *from the* PROFESSIONALS



MATT GOGLE,
KICE INDUSTRIES

"Regardless of what kind of career a person chooses, stay involved and give back to your community, industry, and anyone who values your time. Take every opportunity to learn as much as possible from anyone you can. I find that people are more than willing to share their experiences with anyone that is interested and willing to listen."



PAUL KIRBACH,
MONSANTO

"Being a part of the agriculture industry is a great experience. It seems that no matter where I am connecting with folks in agriculture, it's like we're all part of the same big small town. Working with people that are passionate about producing the food, fuel, fiber and feed that drive this planet is an awesome part of every day and I'm proud to be a part of a great industry!"



RACHEL ROBINSON,
OSBORN BARR

"It's extremely important to not just rely on your peers and company for professional development. You should seek professional development out for yourself."