



The more you put into a seminar, the more you'll get out of it

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All the futurists continue to tell us we're in an information explosion! In addition to books, audios, DVD's, and online learning, there's still eye-to-eye and person-to-person learning. Each day, hundreds of thousands of adults attend learning seminars to acquire specific information to help them do their jobs better, learn new skills, or develop themselves personally.

People spend lots of time deciding whether or not to attend a particular seminar. They generally evaluate the sponsoring organization, the presenter, the program content, and even the location. Cost is always a factor, including the price of the program, travel, and the cost of being away from work. (Let's face it, much of the work waits for us).

But wait! There's~ another factor that determines the success of a learning experience. It's YOU, the participant.

Everyone agrees there are terrific seminars, mediocre seminars, and those that are a real waste of time. Let's assume the sponsoring organization is reputable, the content is relevant, the speaker's style dynamic, and the facility is five star. Even so, if you don't put something into the program, chances are you won't get much out of it either.

If you do some planning before you attend a learning program, you can multiply your personal and professional benefits afterwards. Consider the points in the following checklist. By following these guidelines, you'll be assured of getting the most out of your seminar time and dollars.

- Develop your own objectives. Why are you attending this program? What, specifically, do you hope to gain? Make a list of three or four outcomes that you want from the seminar.
- Prepare a list of specific questions on the topic before you attend. Then ask them at appropriate times during the program or at the end.
- Have realistic expectations of the program. No seminar can address all your issues and needs. Listen for the value points for you and your situation.
- Assume responsibility for what you take out of the program. Participate actively in group discussions. Share your thoughts and ideas freely. You'll find others will do the same once someone starts the ball rolling.
- Take notes. Not just notes on what the speaker is saying, but more importantly, what you will do with the information. Keeping a separate page for "To Do's" will assure that you leave with a specific action plan.
- Meet as many people at the program as possible. Take plenty of business cards. Network. Ask questions of other participants at breaks and lunch. The speaker does not have all the answers, and many of your challenges are shared by fellow participants who have workable solutions.
- Meet the speaker personally. Most speakers love to talk with participants and will gladly answer individual questions and offer insight.

Don't think your problems are insignificant or the speaker too important to talk to you. This is their expertise, and maybe even their profession.

- At the end of the program, ask yourself, "What was the one most valuable point in the program for me?" Then ask yourself, "So what?" In other words, what will you do with what you learned today? How will you use the ideas?
- Share your action plan with another participant before you leave the seminar. If you tell someone else what new attitudes, behavior, or skills you're working on, and ask for their support, you increase your chances for success. Exchange phone numbers or email addresses, and contact each other once a week for the next three weeks. Having an accountability partner to offer support and encouragement helps break old habits and build new ones.
- Plan to report to someone who was not at the seminar. Prepare a synopsis of the program. It will help crystallize what you learned. Better yet, present an oral report to a group of peers and teach them what you learned. Reporting also shows your organization how you benefited from the program, and it will help assure that additional training dollars will be available in the future.

The bottom line is, what you'll take from a seminar is in direct proportion to what you put into it. If you sit back passively and wait to be fed information, it's unlikely that you'll gain very much. But if you go prepared to learn and actively participate, it can be an energizing experience. You'll leave with a renewed commitment to tackle those challenging issues in your life and the motivation to grow personally!

It's what leaders do.

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