

«Further education is never wrong!»- but is it always right?

Many people who are stuck in their career and uncertain about their next steps take up further education. It makes them feel good to be on their way and they think that continuing education can never be wrong. But after graduation, they are often no further along in their professional orientation.

Peter Näf

A few years ago, a young man asked my advice about an MBA. He had an excellent academic background with a degree from an elite French university and had worked for many years in product management at a well-known industrial company. He felt he was at a dead end in his career and therefore considered doing an MBA.

Due to his good educational background, the benefits of the planned further education were not clear to me and I asked him what he wanted to achieve professionally with the MBA. The question astonished him and he got a bit angry because I said that further education only makes sense for people with a university degree if it is oriented towards a goal.

No knowledge acquisition on the shelf

I was dissatisfied with the conversation because of my client's obvious disappointment, until he told me about his experience a few months later: he had applied for an MBA at the most internationally renowned institutions and was invited for an interview by a TOP provider, among others. A professor asked him in the interview what he wanted to do the MBA training for. After my client could not answer the question conclusively, he advised him against studying; without a clear goal, the financial and time expenditure could not

be justified - after all, he already had a good academic background.

Development also happens on the job

In his book «Je älter, desto besser» (the older, the better), Prof. Ernst Pöppel explains that learning for mature people must always have a goal so that what is learned can be linked to existing knowledge; otherwise, it would soon be forgotten all over again.

But where does this reflex to further schooling come from when one's career seems to be coming to a standstill? I assume that people basically want to learn and develop. When we are young, we usually encounter steep learning curves due to a lack of experience, which gives us the satisfying feeling that we are making progress. With increasing experience, the curve flattens. This can give the impression of standing still. We no longer experience learning progress on a daily basis; it is only visible in retrospect and is thus often overlooked. We can counteract this by specifically looking for personal progress and recording it in writing, e.g., in the form of project lists, success journals or learning diaries.

In this way, we realise that we do not primarily grow on the school bench, but above all on professional challenges. And we create space to think about our further development in peace and quiet and to recognise which missing expertise we need to supplement through targeted further training.

The goal of career development always comes before the path of further education.

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