



By Jane Chase, CPP

Avoid the Sidelines—Invest in Yourself During Pandemic

I've always been skeptical of the phrase, "Never let a crisis go to waste," but from where I sit, many in the packaging community took heed of that advice in 2020 as a response to the pandemic that affected us all. Let me explain, and hopefully you will follow suit.

While the pandemic changed our lives through lockdowns, then work-from-home, and now slowly adjusting to getting safely back in our offices and plants, there was a clear trend in 2020 showing that packaging professionals took advantage of time at home to invest in themselves. We are seeing ample evidence of this trend on LinkedIn. Whether it was to prepare to be ready to take on a larger role in their current organization or a need to secure a new employment opportunity, they made time to develop new skill sets to prepare for the challenges brought on by the pandemic.

While in-person training opportunities everywhere were put on the back burner for most of 2020, this did not deter packaging professionals from seeking formal packaging training. The Institute of Packaging Professionals' Fundamentals of Packaging Technology (FPT) online program showed significant growth (course module enrollments increased 96% year over year in 2020). While formal technical training is effective, I would suggest many more opportunities are available to increase your value to your employer and the packaging industry.

Opportunities abound

Universities that have been compelled to offer online learning to their students provide everyone with convenient access to their curriculums. This makes it easier for non-traditional students to take advantage of this course work as well. Have you explored what courses might expand your expertise?

Webinars have always been an option for keeping up on current technologies and trends in the industry, but the number of these offerings has exploded and the breadth of topics has increased. Have you attended a webinar that expands your horizon into an area you might not have explored and that focuses on a new area of interest?

With work from home still the norm, and with fewer social

activities to participate in, I have personally been spending more time reading than usual. What books you choose to read can be a great way to explore a new area of interest. There are lots of great packaging publications to choose from. Again, what interests you beyond what you are immersed in day-to-day?

Have you considered taking your personal development to the next level by adding new credentials to your resume? Your competition

has. Domestically and internationally, more packaging professionals saw fit to invest in becoming recognized as a Certified Packaging Professional (CPP). And partnering with the World Packaging Organisation (WPO), IoPP saw this program grow in 2020 and there are now CPPs in 23 countries. Have you considered solidifying your professional standing in the industry by completing the certification process?

How we are able to network has changed, but that makes it even more important to take time to stay connected. Virtual meetings are a part of your daily work. You should be networking with your peers outside of work using the same format. How

about a virtual happy hour to connect and benchmark best practices with those outside your organization? Have you considered how this could benefit your organization and make you more valuable?

Interactions evolving

Interacting with industry experts has changed as well. How do you connect with experts in the industry to get your questions answered? PackChat—The Packaging Ideas Exchange, offers an online opportunity to pose or answer questions that are pertinent to the industry and engage in conversation with your peers. Do you have expertise and insight to share? Paying it forward is also a wonderful thing to do in a crisis.

Now, a year into the pandemic, I get it. The phrase "Never let a crisis go to waste" clearly can be a positive. Many in the packaging industry have been rallying around opportunities that have presented themselves as doable. And this was not necessarily through self-motivation, but simply because many of us have had additional time available to invest in ourselves and our careers. If you're not seizing the opportunity, why not? **PW**

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