

# Give Yourself the Gift of Professional Development

BY DR. JILL BELLA

Cultivation to the mind is as necessary as food to the body.

*Marcus Tullius Cicero*

Years ago I was about to begin a presentation in Florida and Janet Stutzman, former Project Director of the Early Learning Coalition of Hillsborough County and the woman who coordinated the event, began her welcoming remarks by reminding everyone that the day was designed for them.

“Give yourself the gift of professional development,” she said.

I was so struck by this statement and have since repeated it when I welcome participants myself. What struck me was how often professional development experiences are simply considered something to be checked off our to-do list. Even when we look forward to the topic, we let ourselves be easily distracted. We check our email, we respond to text messages, we sometimes leave the room to take a phone call. We might even arrive late or leave early. All of these distractions can dilute the meaning of the professional development experience and distract from learning.

Professional development is truly a gift. It is dedicated time for personal and professional growth. How rare it is to have a few hours, a day, or even multiple days dedicated to our own learning—to make connections, network, discover resources, add to our knowledge, practice strategies, think critically, grow professionally, and to simply reflect.

The next time you attend a professional development event, face-to-face or otherwise, consider the following:

- What do I hope to gain from this experience?
- What in my environment and personal state of mind can I control so that I can be fully present?
- What are the connections I can make to my work, behaviors, and interests?
- Are there other participants with whom it would be good to network?
- Am I getting everything I can out of this experience, and if not, what can I change so that I am?

**The McCormick Center Leadership Academies are intensive, longitudinal professional development experiences designed as a gift for you! If you are ready to dedicate time and make a commitment to your own professional growth, check out our upcoming academies on the McCormick Center website.**

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