ing programs tend to have more-effective programs. If you invest in learning and development, make sure you define measures of success beforehand. Regularly check whether these programs have a measurable impact on metrics like productivity, retention, and job satisfaction. If they don't, scrap them and shift your focus to investing in new technologies or strategies that have a track record of success. But don't be afraid to dump those too if they don't deliver. Keep going until you find tools and processes that you can prove work best for your people.

Any workplace can benefit from adopting the mindset that you learn best when you learn less. These recommendations might seem small, or even simple, but they can unlock your teams' full potential—and just might save you millions of dollars along the way.

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# 10. Three Ways to Use MOOCs to Advance Your Career

→ by WALTER FRICK

THE VAST MAJORITY of people who sign up for a MOOC (massive open online course) never complete it. More than 50% consume less than half the course's content. This is wrongly viewed as evidence that MOOCs don't work, that people are dropping off and not getting value. The assumption behind that conclusion is that you have to complete a whole, semester-long course to get value from online education. As a MOOC addict, I can tell you: That's not true. Instead, I've found there are at least three good ways to learn from MOOCs, depending on your goals and the time you plan to spend.

In some cases, it makes sense to go for a certificate, which means completing all the coursework. That usually costs money. For courses on Coursera, edX, or Udacity, getting a certificate typically requires several hours of work per week, for several weeks or even months. In the end, you get to add a line to your résumé certifying that you completed the course.

But that's not the only way to use MOOCs. Another choice is to audit a course, watching all the videos but not necessarily completing all the assignments. The downside is you don't get a certificate, and in some cases, you don't have full access to quizzes or other helpful materials. The upside is you have less pressure to get the work done and can usually learn at your own pace. Often this option is also available for free.

Finally, sometimes you can get what you want just by sampling a MOOC, watching a video here or there to get the specific knowledge you need. For example, say you want to do some regression modeling in Excel. Other resources may exist to learn about regression, but the instruction in

## ■■ Showing off what you have learned in an MOOC is doable without certification.

MOOCs is often of higher quality. Instead of watching a full course, you might find a single lesson within a broader statistics course and watch just that lesson. Many of the platforms will let you sample for free, though others, like Lynda.com, run on a subscription basis.

The key is to make MOOCs work for you so that you can learn the things you want to, whether it's improving at work, getting a new job, or just having fun.

How do you know which path is right for you? Here are some questions to help you decide:

**Are you completely new to the topic?** If you have no background in the topic you want to learn about, taking the full course for certification is more likely to make sense. Sampling isn't a good strategy because you'll have a harder time deciding what you need to learn ahead of time. (You don't know what you don't know.) Auditing might still be an option, but the extra effort to complete the assignments will ensure that you actually learn what you hope to, and those assignments are often available only if you pay for certification.

On the other hand, if you're already somewhat fa-miliar with the topic but need to brush up on it, auditing or sampling may make more sense. Maybe you took a marketing course in school, for instance, and you intersect with the field a bit at work, but you want to refresh on the basics. Auditing a course by watching all the videos might do the trick, even if you don't complete all the assignments or pay for certification. Or, if you're trying to brush up on something narrower, seeking out and sampling a few specific videos may be enough.

**How much time can you commit?** Most people who sign up for MOOCs don't end up completing the full course because doing so takes considerable time and effort (and usually costs money).

Attempting to complete the course and receive certification makes sense only if you can spare the time. If you pay to take a MOOC, plan out when you can do the work. For instance, if you commute using public transportation, you could watch the videos on your way to and from work, leaving only the assignments for nights and weekends.

If you don't have several hours a week to commit, auditing or sampling will allow you to absorb the material on your own schedule.

**How will you demonstrate to others what you've learned?** If you're just learning for your own enjoyment, you probably don't need to pay for a MOOC, since the main thing the money buys you is certification. But if you're doing the course for work, you'll want some way to show off what you've learned.

In some cases, that's doable without certification. Maybe you can demonstrate your new knowledge of finance by helping with your department's budget. Or if you're learning mobile app development, you could build an app as a side project. If these options seem sufficient to showcase your skills or knowledge, you may not need to pay for the course. Alternatively, if what you're learning isn't conducive to side projects easily incorporated into your current job, paying for a certification is most likely worth it.

If you choose to audit a course because you plan to use what you've learned through a side project, think ahead of time about exactly what that project will be. Be realistic. It's easy to say you'll build a website in your spare time once your course ends; in practice, you'll need to consider how you'll find the time.

Too much of the discussion around MOOCs has focused narrowly on people spending a semester on a particular course, but that's not the only option. Taking a course for certification makes sense if you have the time, are new to a topic, or need the certification to demonstrate what you've learned. Otherwise, auditing a course, or just sampling parts of it, can still help you get better at your job.

There's never been more free (or nearly free) quality educational resources available to anyone with an internet connection. Why not find a way to improve your skills and career? After all, someone else in your field surely is.

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