

## A personal story about learning to be professional'

### Context

I have learned incrementally over several years what 'being professional' means, through a variety of experiences in different occupational sectors. Before coming into higher education I worked as assistant editor on a weekly magazine, cabin crew on long-haul flights, dental surgery assistant, education administrator and careers adviser.

### What I learned, and how

My job in magazine journalism used and developed my communication and self-management skills, all learned informally on the job. I selected articles of general and local interest, typed, edited, proof-read and made page layouts. At the time there was not a computer in sight and manuscripts were typeset manually. All the front-of-house, printing and production processes were under one roof, so there was much personal interaction with the editorial and production team. The use of electronic forms of communication and production have since transformed this job. However the attributes I gained then have subsequently served me well, particularly in writing my book as a single author, published by Routledge in 2007.

In my next job as cabin crew, professionalism in serving airline passengers took a strong customer focus: an emphasis on clear, helpful communication and service to passengers, getting them safely and comfortably from A to B. I learned the importance of body language, self-presentation and inter-cultural communication skills.

After several years raising my sons these skills transferred to a part-time job as dental surgery assistant. The patients I was dealing with here were like my passengers – sometimes irate or nervous, in need of reassurance, clear communication, safety procedures...

To cut a long story short, I have learned that the level, range, type and complexity of 'skill' that I use might change with the personal or professional context, but it is possible to transfer key competencies and attributes from one experience to another, gaining success through the 'life-career journey'.

### Lessons for educators

- Make 'graduate attributes' visible and comprehensible by expressing them as behavioural competencies, and show students how such behaviours are effective for success in study, work and life in general.
- Provide learning, teaching and assessment opportunities in the curriculum for integrated personal, academic and career development, and for practicing professionalism.
- Encourage students to identify their **Self-MAPs** – i.e. each individual's unique possession and combination of **Motivation**, **Ability** and **Personality** factors.
- These Self-MAPs map onto the demands made by different opportunities in different ways. The dynamic between **Self** and **Opportunity** generates and modifies **Aspirations** and leads to **Results** (ref. **SOARing to Success** approaches).
- The SOAR framework can enable students to identify and develop those aspects of professionalism that are both generic and specific requirements in terms of employability attributes.

### 5 key words

<b>Behavioural competencies</b>	<b>Graduate attributes</b>	<b>SOAR framework</b>	<b>Self-MAP</b>	<b>Opportunity</b>
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