

The best performers know their subject, but they are also curious about everything else. Drawing knowledge from unlikely places fuels ideas, leading to a richer service and stronger client relationships.

"I started my career in insurance in London, but my wife and I decided to move due to commuting times and costs, as well as the expensive house prices in the southeast," says Daniel Wakefield of Marsh insurance brokers. "We both agreed on Leeds; the city has a thriving insurance hub yet is really close to so many areas of outstanding natural beauty."

Mr Wakefield is studying for the CII Diploma, supported by the Leeds Institute. He is one of 12 on the programme.

"Formal study is key to progression," he believes. "It builds up your knowledge in a structured way, while keeping you motivated to improve, which increases your confidence as you develop your on-the-job skills."

But Mr Wakefield rates range of knowledge as highly as depth: "You also learn a lot about peripheral aspects through modules about finance and the legal background to insurance, which can really help you."

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

But how do you acquire the magpie-like quality that enables you to pick up gems and store them away for future use? Well, it's all available to any member pitching up at local institute events.

And Leeds is very active. "There's always plenty going on; the monthly lunchtime lectures are particularly interesting," continues Mr Wakefield. "I find it's always worth going, even if the subject may not appear relevant to me at first glance."

"I often come away having learnt something that will be useful," he maintains. "These sessions work in a similar way to the course content – the more you learn, the more you can use that knowledge in business."

So direct relevance does not always matter – there is often something in it that you can draw on later.

"If a client asks you a question about some topical aspect of insurance, you've got the information to hand, and that's

always better than having to say you don't know but you'll gladly find out," continues Mr Wakefield. "Being able to explain things well to people makes the job more enjoyable and makes me more confident too."

The Leeds Institute events keep the information flowing, as the Marsh man explains: "It's a great benefit as it's provided for you; all you have to do is attend the events, be willing to learn, and take on board what you hear."

SOFT SKILLS

Similarly, creating a rapport with clients demands more than doing the job – it requires a wider appreciation of the business context, which can be enhanced by what you know, but equally by the people you meet. There again, the local institute can help.

"I recently attended the Emerging Insurance Professionals Group launch," explains Mr Wakefield. "It brings together a lot of people in similar roles, as well as those in different parts of the profession." But crucially, it's not in a specific work context. "As a relative newcomer to the city, being part of the Leeds Institute is enabling me to build my professional network, while benefitting from all the training, education and learning opportunities on offer."

More knowledge comes from such interactions and appreciation of other parts of the business. So for people like Mr Wakefield, expanding your knowledge beyond the job role has unexpected benefits.

It helps you deliver a better service by contextualising information for clients and more fully explaining the circumstances surrounding insurance decisions. And that in turn increases the general sense of fulfilment and the feeling that your career is creating wider benefits.

For more information, visit: www.cii.co.uk/fvebigwords

A THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE

One local institute attendee explains how the knowledge available creates confidence and satisfaction in doing more for clients

