

November 2019



## Update, upgrade and upskill: 5 ways to steer your professional development

By Nancy Ellen Miller

**W**hen I read that nearly 70% of employees feel disengaged at work, Dolly Parton's 1981 hit single "9 to 5" immediately came to mind. In it, she bemoans her 9 to 5 job where "it's all takin' and no givin'."

Needless to say, the daily grind can compromise anyone's curiosity. Neuroscience tells us that the adult brain thrives when it's learning new things, engaging in novel activities, and overcoming challenges. But few companies see the link between investing in their employees' ongoing education and the company's overall success. Professional development (PD)—ideally a place where you can engage your curiosity while gaining potent professional skills—often gets derailed in the name of more immediate priorities.

While many companies speak fiercely of the value of developing leaders and adopting an innovative mindset, day-to-day operations may speak otherwise.

### If you're an indie, you're in a special position to steer your own PD.

You know the importance of investing in your career. You network. You learn new tricks of your trade. With online learning so readily available—and often costing no more than a subscription fee—the obstacle to professional development is usually less about access and more about overwhelm. But whether you're new at independent communications or an old hat, here are five strategies you can take to up your game.

#### 1. Attend a conference, preferably as a speaker

Conferences, whether held for a single day or a whole week, expose you to ideas in your industry and can fire up your passion for what you do. They are also a great way to network. Many offer opportunities to speak or give a workshop, which gives you the chance to hone your public speaking skills and craft your message clearly and compellingly. The next IABC World Conference is scheduled for Chicago in June 2020. The theme is Shift: #Areyouready. This

month alone, Toronto hosts the [Annual Strategic Internal Communication Conference](#) and the [Leadership Development for Women Conference](#). Check out your region for more!

#### 2. Expand your range

Too often we get stuck in one type of activity, usually limited to the skills we think we know. Why not try something outside of your standard scope? Think aspirationally; move outside your comfort zone. Pick a project that will force you to learn new things and seek out new resources and networking opportunities.

#### 3. Find a mentor

A mentor does not necessarily have to be older than you. Young people can be great resources when it comes to helping us see with new eyes. Whomever you choose as a mentor, look to someone who already holds the professional qualities you'd like to have. Buy that person lunch. Build a relationship. Process decisions with your mentor. Ask them questions. Mentorship is one of the fastest ways to develop professional skills and offers

insights that no course alone can.

#### 4. Take a course

Online. Offline. A few hours. A whole year. Choose a course that motivates you and adds to your skills. You might gain a certificate or even a degree. There are endless options available from [edX](#), [Coursera](#), [Udemy](#), or [Skillshare](#). More locally, The University of Toronto School of Continuing Studies has a great lineup of courses and instructors—as does Ryerson, Seneca, York, George Brown, and Humber College. [IABC has its own Academy](#). You can earn credits if you're interested in applying to the Communication Management Professional (CMP) or Strategic Communication Management Professional (SMCP) certification.

#### 5. Enrol in a PD event

As you likely already know, PIC and IABC both offer workshops and events throughout the year, all aimed specifically at communicators. Keep an eye out for the e-Lert and upcoming editions of *The Buzz*.



*Nancy Miller specializes in marketing and communication strategies for education technology and corporate learning and is PIC's Co-Director of Communications. She can be reached at [nancy@nancyellenmiller.com](mailto:nancy@nancyellenmiller.com)*

# Video marketing: That's a wrap!

## PIC's latest PD event



*Thumbnails with a smiling face get more clicks than any other image.*

*The more targeted your video is, the better it will be. Decide who your audience is to be effective as a video marketer.*

*Make sure your clients are involved when planning and editing your videos! They can help you with details you might miss.*

*Consider your platforms: @YouTube or @Vimeo?*

*One idea for promoting your independent communications business is to use live video when you attend a conference.*

*What kind of DIY video content can you use? Vlogs, video bios and testimonials are all ideas.*

*Long form content may be the future of marketing. You heard it here first. ;)*

### See you on social media

Build and strengthen your connections with other PIC members, advance your communications business, discuss business issues and network with PIC on social media: on Twitter at [@pictoronto](#); LinkedIn, [IABC Toronto Professional Independent Communicators](#); Facebook, [Professional Independent Communicators \(PIC\), part of IABC/Toronto](#).

*Check out recent posts focused on raising your rates as well as how to successfully send newsletters to build your business.*

## PIC PERSONALITY:

# Meet Diana Degan, ABC

By Sue Horner



**DIANA DEGAN, ABC, is President, Diana Degan & Associates, an award-winning integrated marketing communications firm. Diana helps clients, whatever their size and budget, achieve their business goals through effective marketing communications. Learn more on her [website](#) and [LinkedIn](#), reach her by [email](#) or call 519-829-3804.**

## How did your business come about?

After earning my Bachelor of Applied Arts in Journalism at Ryerson, I worked for many years at ad agencies and PR and marketing agencies. I also got my Certified Advertising Agency Practitioner (CAAP) designation, which is a bit like getting an MBA.

In August 2001, I was laid off. I was looking at other offers and thinking about going out on my own and started to get calls from previous clients. Then Cadbury offered me a job covering a maternity leave. I took it but negotiated one day a week to build my own business. It was a good way to make the transition.

## How has your business changed over the years?

My business has morphed as clients, projects and life changed. I worked with a fabulous client, and then the family sold the business. I went through a divorce and had to change the name of my business after 10 years with my ex's name. I remarried six years ago and started a side business called Divorce Details. A divorce means a lot of paperwork, and I helped people with that. In 2015, I got a financial planning licence too, but I missed the marketing and PR business, so I came back to that.

## What do you enjoy most about being an indie?

- I love that I can make work weave around my life. I can be up to 2 a.m. for a client and then sleep in, or get to a doctor's appointment at 10 a.m. At some agencies, that just wasn't possible.
- I love being able to work on my front porch in lovely weather or work with spa music on and scented candles.
- I love being able to choose who I work for or won't work for; or being able to walk away when a client turns difficult.
- I love that I can choose to work for free or a reduced rate if I want because it's a worthy cause.

## What don't you like about being an indie?

- It's such a solitary business. You have nobody to brainstorm with, nobody in the next office to talk to.

- You are your own IT person.
- I hate having to chase clients for money.
- The fact that it's just me. I schedule my time and take a certain number of clients and projects based on that. The business cycle to land a client may take months so it's disappointing if a client backs out.

## What advice would you give someone new to independent life?

- Get your line of credit, car loan and mortgage lined up before you launch, because you'll have a hard time once you're independent.
- Use a letter of agreement with every client. And get money up front before you start work.
- Don't let clients tell you they don't need status reports. Those will save your butt later on.
- You need discipline. Distractions will nail you – cake in the fridge, a sale at the mall, kids with homework.
- Celebrate those industry wins. Your family doesn't always understand how important they are.

## How long have you been an IABC/PIC member and what value do you get from your membership?

I joined IABC in 1998, and PIC the same year. Both have been a great resource and source of connection. I get the most when I join in. I've been on the Toronto board, worked on programming for the World Conference in Toronto and on the OVATION awards, and Gold Quill judging. I love seeing how other communicators think and getting insight into what they do around the world. Whenever I'm faced with a challenge, I go to IABC.



*PIC members offer a range of talent, from coaching and media relations to video production and writing. Our PIC Personality feature randomly profiles our members. Let [Sue Horner](#) or [Nancy Miller](#) know if you'd like to be profiled and they'll be in touch to set it up. Sue is a writer, principal of [Get It Write](#) and Co-Director of Communications for PIC.*

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## THE INDEPENDENT VIEW

## Less consumption, more execution

By Nkiru Asika

In the late 19th century, consumption (tuberculosis) was the leading cause of death in the Western world. Today, we're suffering from a different form of consumption—information overload.

**T**he average person globally spends 82 hours per week—69% of our waking hours—consuming information according to Loup Ventures. In the West, those numbers are closer to 100% because even when we don't think we're actively consuming information, we are. We're listening to a podcast in one ear, with the TV running silently in the background, while simultaneously checking emails on a laptop and scrolling through Instagram on our phones.

When you're running a business, especially a business that is built around your creative skills or intellect, there's a tendency to consume a lot of information. Yes, we need to develop our expertise, but excess consumption can lead to overwhelm. It can also become a crutch that prevents us from stepping up to a higher level of performance.

It's far less taxing to read a book, listen to a talk or buy a course than to actually create our own content or implement our own ideas. It's much easier to learn than to do. It's more comfortable to consume than to produce.

I, for one, can chase any shiny object that even

winks in my direction. New information? Bring it on. But when I compare the ratio of the time I have spent consuming information to the level of execution of what I've consumed, the imbalance is startling.

The human brain is more of a processor than a sponge. It's all well and good to soak up new knowledge, but if that knowledge just sits there in

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our brains without further processing or output, then it's taking up mental space that could be put to far better use.

A couple of months ago, I heard online marketing coach Amy Porterfield discuss the concept of Super Thinking. Essentially Super Thinking is about looking to yourself for answers before anyone else. Write down the questions on your mind. Then take the time to answer them. Without Google. Without phoning a friend. Without reference to any guru. You may be surprised by the wisdom and clarity that emanates

from your inner reservoir of experience, knowledge, intuition and innate understanding. Going forward, let's commit to better curation of the knowledge we allow into our heads. Quality information (such as PIC/IABC seminars, webinars and publications) will always help you up your game and make you more competitive.

Let's also commit to put what we consume into action and to spend more time consulting with the person who knows, understands and can guide us best—ourselves.

As always, if you have any ideas for professional development topics, possible speakers

(including yourself) or any questions, concerns or ideas about PIC, please don't hesitate to reach me at [toronto-sig@iabc.toronto](mailto:toronto-sig@iabc.toronto).

Onwards and upwards.

**Nkiru Asika**  
Chair, PIC; VP, Special Interest Groups, IABC/Toronto



### Dec. 12: Come in from the cold at the PIC winter social

You can already feel winter in the air. What better place to get cozy than at our seasonal social? We'll meet at our usual spot—The [Duke of York](#). Only steps away from St. George subway, (east of Bedford Road, north of Bloor Street), it's the perfect spot to network in the most enjoyable way possible.

IABC/Professional Independent Communicators (PIC) get together seasonally to mix and mingle with fellow independent and communications professionals. **Join us this December 12 from 6:30pm onwards.** Exchange comms notes, insider secrets, and bouts of laughter. This event is open to members and non-members.

[REGISTER HERE](#)

# Member news



**Diana Degan**, ABC, CAAP, took on new responsibilities in September as professor at Conestoga College. She's teaching Writing Essentials in Conestoga's two-year Strategic Marketing Communications post-grad certificate program for international students, and Ethics & Issues in the Public Relations diploma program. "I've had

teaching on my bucket list for long time," she says. "I've gone right back to my roots talking about grammar, language, copywriting and brainstorming, and I'm loving it."



**Maryjane Martin**, MS, APR, CPRS Fellow, an instructor at Ryerson's Chang School, is looking for panelists for a series she is co-facilitating on the effective use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The talks on "AI in Our Lives" take place at the Ryerson library. The library is looking for representatives in the HR (recruiting) and dating/match-

making sectors. If you or any of your clients are involved in AI and would like to participate, email her at [mj@martinandco.com](mailto:mj@martinandco.com) to find out more. Just want to learn more about AI? The discussions are free and open to the public. The next session is November 19 at 4:30 p.m., at the Collaboratory, Ryerson Library, with Benji Sucher's presentation "Disruption: Artificial Intelligence and Venture Capital!"



**Gary Schlee** has been busy promoting his book, [Unknown and Unforgettable: A Guide to Canada's Prime Ministers](#), by giving presentations at the Toronto Public Library and other spots. Called "Things You Might Not Know About Canada's Prime Ministers," the talks share personal and political anecdotes about some of our

former leaders. "The library talks were great fun," Gary says. "Given the timing of the talks [near the election], there were lots of interesting questions related to past and present elections." (Photo credit: Max MacDonald, a former student.)



**Bill Smith** has a new collaborative passion project called [Defend the Darkroom](#). He's joined with friends Paulette Michayluk and John Meadows (a local podcast community stalwart) to interview photographic masters. They're finding out the thought processes and influences behind the photographs and art they create.

*PIC members, let's celebrate your achievements and milestones in The Buzz. Send your member news to [Sue Horner](#) or [Nancy Miller](#).*

[Professional Independent Communicators](#) (PIC) is a special interest group of [IABC/Toronto](#). PIC's mission is to support independent IABC/Toronto communicators through professional development, networking and marketing. [IABC](#) connects communicators from around the world with the insights, resources and people they need to drive their careers and the profession forward.

**THE BUZZ** *The Buzz* informs members about upcoming events, shares professional development tips from past meetings and keeps us connected. Editor this issue: [Nancy Miller](#) | Graphic design: [Deana De Ciccio](#).

**Want to recap a meeting or do other writing for *The Buzz*?** Contact [Sue Horner](#) or [Nancy Miller](#).

## Quick links

- [PIC on the web](#)
- [PIC on LinkedIn](#)
- [@PICToronto](#) on Twitter
- Email us: [toronto-sig@iabc.to](mailto:toronto-sig@iabc.to)
- [Join our mailing list!](#)
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## PIC executive

Contact any of us with questions, comments and ideas for speakers or topics:

Chair: [Nkiru Asika](#)

Past Chair: [Sharon Aschaiek](#)

Communications: [Sue Horner](#), [Nancy Miller](#)

Membership: [Kathy Lim](#)

Programming: [Judy Irwin](#), [Sharon McMillan](#)

Social Media: (*vacant; let us know if you can help!*)

Design: [Deana De Ciccio](#)

