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THE EDUCATION ISSUE

Careers beyond the classroom

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A teaching legacy

*Playing
it forward*

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Get out of your career comfort zone

Move forward or fall behind. By Lee Gomes

"Don't look back. Someone might be gaining on you." Satchell Paige, the great baseball player and humorist, made that classic remark with the goal of helping people keep their wits about them on the baseball field.

But this advice is just as relevant in the office. In both places, anyone interested in getting ahead needs to remember that lots of other people have the same idea. Career experts say that one of the first things you need to appreciate is that just keeping current, all by itself, isn't going to be enough.

"There are probably a lot of people out there who share the same job title as you, and do the same thing that you can do," says branding coach William Arruda, whose new book is *Ditch! Dare! Do!* "If you only think about 'staying current,' then actually, you are falling behind. The only way to get ahead is to realize that you're probably sitting in a comfort zone, and that you need to be willing to take a step out of it."

Arruda and other career experts say that staying ahead in your field isn't much different from other career objectives. If you put in a little planning and dedicated work, you're likely to reach your goals.

Follow industry blogs

The good thing is that plenty of help is available, starting with the World Wide Web. Joel Garfinkle, author of *Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level*, says that many of the tools of the Internet are ideal for the career-conscious mid-level employee.

"In today's content-rich Internet, it's easier than ever to stay current in your field," he says. "For example, I recommend following a handful of high-quality blogs that relate to the line of work that you are in." Garfinkle recommends asking senior people in your department which blogs they regularly follow. "Every field has them by now," he says, and most are free.

"But don't just be a 'lurker' in the background," Garfinkle adds. "Challenge yourself to comment on one or two articles per week, and then try to stay engaged in the conversation. It's a great way to expose yourself to new and diverse perspectives. And it gets your name out there."

Become social media savvy

The Internet played a big role in one of Arruda's clients getting head. He was a member of a small finance department, and he was such a technological dinosaur that he didn't even use email and had his secretary print out his messages. But the executive knew he was falling behind, so he made the bold decision to become the department's expert in social media.

It wasn't easy, said Arruda, considering how far behind he was and how much he had to learn. But eventually, he became such an expert that he was known not just in the finance department, but throughout the entire company, and is now on the radar screens of many higher-level managers, including many outside his own department.

Attend professional conferences

Of course, not all examples of getting ahead take place in cyberspace. Many of them happen where they always did, in conference rooms. Garfinkle says, “Even though every professional I know has plenty to do, I advise people to set aside a few days per year to attend some sort of professional conference or workshop.