Empowering People through Development
Erin Schreyer

Companies spend a lot of money on training and development. In most cases, it’s because they want to teach their employees the skills they feel are necessary for success within their organization or industry. Sometimes, it’s added to the budget for employee retention purposes. Companies want to show their people that they value them enough to invest in them. That’s a great thing too. But what if there was another, perhaps even more compelling reason to develop people?

What if the reason was to promote a leadership culture within your organization? What if companies were willing to engage their people at a level that, in fact, they weren’t simply engaging them, but actually empowering them? Empowering them as leaders who don’t just learn things, but who leverage their best talents and strengths to make an impact.

It makes sense after all. When you ask most people what they’re looking for in their next position, the answer is almost always the same...

"I need to make enough money to provide for my family and lifestyle, and I’d like to be able to leverage my skills and experience… but what I’m REALLY looking for is the opportunity to make an impact on an organization."

If companies want to further develop their people, the best thing they can do is engage them to do what they want most.... make an impact! How do they do that? Allow and encourage them to lead from who they are and where they are within the organization!!

Here’s how:
- Encourage employees to clearly identify and communicate their strengths to make their greatest contribution to their team and organization. Everyone should understand what activities help them to feel their strongest, and they should be aware of and consider their co-workers’ strengths too.
- Provide training opportunities specific to an employee’s strengths, where they will have the greatest transformation. Growth will always be more exponential in areas of strengths, versus weaknesses.

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- Provide opportunities for people to challenge themselves by further leveraging their strengths to maximize their development. Training people is only part of the equation. People become proficient at things they practice. You need to help them build their strength “muscles” and then allow them to be flexed.
- Empower your employees to be visionary, to think outside of the box and to do things differently than they may have been done before… and encourage everyone that it’s okay if new ideas don’t work. Encourage – don’t stifle – creativity!
- Create a leadership culture with clear communication and support for leadership at all levels. Be deliberate and consistent in promoting this style of engagement, and be intentional about pulling the best out of everyone.
- Communicate and celebrate new personal accomplishments. Make a big deal out of each person’s growth and development and the positive effect it has had on the organization. That is, after all, what they REALLY want to do, so be sure to tie it back for them and others to see!

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Adults Like to Learn. No, Really
Jennifer V. Miller

Ever show up to facilitate a training session and sense that you’ve walked into hostile territory? There is a way to help turn things around: respect your learner’s adulthood. By doing this, you will diffuse much of your learners’ dysfunctional behaviors.

Think about it: A training session has the potential the set up a dynamic that feels like, “You’re here because you don’t know something. I, as the facilitator know more than you.” If that’s the vibe, it puts learners in vulnerable position. People who feel vulnerable don’t always behave nicely.

OK, so I know you would never say those words, nor do you believe them. Here’s the thing: people have had some unfortunate experiences in a learning environment, going as far back as kindergarten and continuing right up to that deadly boring Safety Training class last week. You are working against pre-conceived notions about what learning is as soon as the participants walk in the door.

Whether or not you as the facilitator know more than they do isn’t the point. The point is for the learners to hear you acknowledge that they are smart and do have experiences worth hearing about. That’s respecting their adult-ness.

True, some folks show up to training acting more like a belligerent three-year old than an adult. Look past this. Treat them like the grown-up you know they can be and soon enough, they will come around. Maybe they won’t be all smiles and enthusiastic participation, but they also will not be sabotaging your every move during your learning session.

How?
1. Greet every person by name, look them in the eye and shake their hand. It’s difficult for someone to be a jerk if you’ve created a personal connection with them.
2. Early in the session, find a way to acknowledge their experience.
3. Trainers never come out looking good in a debate. If someone contradicts your suggestion, ask, “How would you handle it?”
4. Relate on their level—literally. Sit down in the front of the room or kneel down next to their table when talking with them. Don’t hover over them. It’s too reminiscent of school and authority figures.

So, the next time you’re faced with learners resistant to training, stifle your urge to “show ‘em who’s in charge”. Instead, take a deep breath and do some role-modeling of adult behavior. They just may surprise you and follow your lead.

"The point is for the learners to hear you acknowledge that they are smart and do have experiences worth hearing about. That’s respecting their adult-ness."

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The question: “How might you use this?”
Steve Boese

Over the years most of the training programs, sessions, courses, etc. I have delivered to corporate groups, individuals, or to college students have had a strong technology focus. With technology training there is always a strong element of the ‘nuts and bolts’ and the practical skills that are needed to understand and master the technology in question. Whether you are learning to use a new workplace system, to drive a car, or to play the trumpet, the basics certainly have to be well drilled and ultimately mastered in order to eventually achieve higher order capability and even virtuosity.

But I think often in the learning of a new skill, tool, or concept many students can become bored, disengaged, and even frustrated by what can be a lengthy process of mastering the basics. This concept is no different from the grumpy elementary or middle school child that seems to spend at least a few years of their youth constantly questioning ‘Why do I have to learn this?’ and ‘I will never need to know this once I get out of school’.

As parents and teachers of these students, we usually do make an attempt at linking the topics in school to some long-term aspirational objectives, but since that usually fails to convince the student of the importance of the content, we often resort to more persuasive reasoning, the ‘because I said so’ declaration.

For training and learning developed in the corporate context or in the adult education environment, the need for the instructor to effectively connect the training and the content to important organizational and/or personal development objectives and outcomes would seem to be less important. After all, the ‘students’ are not 9 year old kids, they are employees, adult learners, they have elected the training course for a reason. They should fully grasp the reasons why they are participating.

But the truth is even in these corporate contexts training can still be seen as a necessary evil, something to be completed to be checked off a list and to be quickly forgotten about once they return to ‘real’ work. I think one of the best ways to try and mitigate this fairly common and natural tendency of students is to challenge them, early and often with some simple questions - ‘How might you use this?’, ‘How can you envision applying this in your department?’, and ‘What is the situation at your company that can be improved with this insight?’

Unless you are working towards some kind of lofty, philosophical understanding of the universe simply for its own sake, or sitting on top of a snowy mountain pondering the meaning of life, for training and development programs to be worth the time and effort to prepare and deliver them, they have to resonate and connect with the learners at an individual level. Just like the petulant 9 year old that wants to know ‘Why do I have to learn this?’

“After all, the ‘students’ are not 9 year old kids, they are employees, adult learners, they have elected the training course for a reason.”

You as the instructor have to address that question with your adult learners, but since they are adults, you can challenge them to come up with their own answer to that question. Once they do, the value and commitment will follow.

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Become a Storyteller
Chris Ferdinandi

Training isn’t just about delivering information from one brain to another. It’s about getting people to both remember it and act on it.

When most training programs fail, it’s not because they haven’t taught people anything useful. It’s that people either don’t remember or don’t apply what they learned.

How do you ensure that doesn’t happen?

We don’t pay attention to boring things.

John Medina is a brain scientist. (His actual title is a lot longer and has a lot of initials after it.) He wrote an amazing book called Brain Rules. In it, he explores how brain science might impact how we run our organizations.

One rule that really jumped out at me: We don’t pay attention to boring things.

When you’re developing a training program, don’t just inform people. Entertain them.

“Humans are natural storytellers. It’s in our genes. Before written language, it’s how we passed down information.”

People are more likely to actually retain and use the information that you give them if they have fun while they’re learning. So how do you make learning more fun?

Become a Storyteller

Humans are natural storytellers. It’s in our genes. Before written language, it’s how we passed down information.

Make storytelling part of your training program. Share your own stories. Ask people for theirs. And build a “story” into the program itself. What’s the key message? How does the way you dispense information build on that message? Is there a story arc?

Garr Reynolds is author of the blog and book Presentation Zen. While his focus is on presentations with slides, he talks at length about the importance of storytelling when spreading ideas.

His insights have drastically changed the way I deliver training programs... and the response I get from people!

Obviously, running an effective training program is more than just telling fun stories. You have to understand the needs of your audience, align behaviors with business results and so on. But if you want to ensure that people remember and act on the information that you share, make it fun.

Become a storyteller.

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10 tips: Preparation for your presentation!
Benjamin McCall

I'm a facilitator by trade and practice...
...The learning aspect of it is something I really love. Many of you have may have coached, facilitated, designed programs and interactions. You may have been in front of groups of one to one thousand. But if you are like me it never fails... something always happens. Before I get in front of a group; from a technical presentation, facilitation or leadership development – I always get nervous. Preparation is great, but for a few seconds between when I am introduced and that first set of words, I tend to go blank. So being prepared and having practiced helps!

Presentation Tips
Here are some not as common tips for being prepared; calming the jitters and helping the learner get what you are delivering.

1. **Do your research.** Know what you are talking about. At the very least, prepare to answer the questions that your audience may have in their minds. Know that anything can happen. So be ready and comfortable with not being “ready or comfortable!”

2. **Know your audience (Make a Connection).** You have to understand your audience in order to provide the right information for the most optimum engagement. The better you understand them, the more they will get what they need. Through this you can make a better connection with your audience.

3. **Be Learner Focused.** This means not delivering the way you always deliver. Be aware of how your audience may react to the style and material you present. Change up that style when appropriate. If you don’t you could lose them.

4. **Use Multi-Media.** From video, drawings, activities, case studies and audio; you can use a variety of media formats to strengthen and engage the learner. Don’t just lecture.

5. **Tell a story.** Regardless of how you deliver information, use the activities and material to tell a story that directly relates to the role your learner is in. You have technical data. Facts and figures help with relevance but if you want people to remember it easily and take action, a story from your own experience will make a solid impact. It allows the listener to paint a picture that is relevant for them.

6. **Make Eye Contact.** Your subject could be dry, deep or inspiring. But if you make eye contact with your audience it can come across as passion. This simple act may help people believe that you believe what you are saying.

7. **Humor is key!** Maybe it is just me but humor helps lighten things up. It helps clear the air. Be careful though, like taste – your humor may not taste the same to everyone.

8. **Be concise.** I am constantly working at this. Example, in a format where a presentation must be 5 minutes, 20 slides, and auto-advance after 15 seconds – you have to get to the point. Make a point but don’t milk it too much for each idea. This is especially true for technical info.

9. **Move with a purpose.** Body language can have an impact on any presentation. Try not to move your hands, arms or whole body around too much. It can be distracting. Moving and standing in one place at the right moments can add meaning to you and your topic.

10. **Close with a call to action!** I think that at the end of every presentation there should be a call to action. A chance for others to engage in your cause or do something on their own to move forward toward action.

These are just some steps you may follow and while these may not be the end all be all, they can be used as starters to help point you in the right direction as well as keep the audience on your page. Is there anything that you do to connect to your crowd?

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