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Dear Reader,

We are proud to be sending out our issue # 50. To honor the occasion, we thought "What topic could be more appropriate for this issue, than Learning that Lasts?" That we have been able to maintain along the years the uninterrupted flow of newsletters prepared for you, is mainly due to the fact that we in LIM take our learning very seriously, that we want to constantly ask ourselves what are we learning, that we want to remember what we did learn, and that this prepares us better to face the very changing world we live and work in.

This article is a bit longer than usual - but we decided to share it in the full version, as we feel it is highly applicable to the experiences of most readers.

We hope you think the same.

Enjoy the reading!

Isabel Rimanoczy
Editor

Quote of the Month
" Those who say it cannot be done should get out of the way of those who are doing it."
Joel Barker - The Business of Paradigms

LIM NEWS

We develop your leaders while they develop your business

Learning That Lasts
By Ernie Turner

What makes learning last? Over the last few years I've had a number of conversations with clients and colleagues about this question when discussing leadership development and team development. We are all interested in understanding what we can do to support individuals to go from awareness to sustainable changed behavior. Some of the specific skills we are thinking about include: coaching direct reports and peers; having difficult conversations; providing timely feedback; influencing; communicating clearly; creating a participatory environment; running effective meetings; creating an inspiring, achievable and shared vision; critical thinking; making effective decisions; contracting roles and responsibilities; making meaning from, and learning from, experiences; developing realistic and powerful plans that are implemented; delegating with authority and clarity; sharing leadership; etc. In this article I'd like to share with you the ground we covered in our conversations.

First, we defined why this question was worth exploring. We all agreed that traditional classroom training programs produce limited results when developing leaders and teams. Therefore, we quickly came to the conclusion that since most companies spend a small fortune on training programs in these areas that do not deliver the sustainable change required or desired, there was a strong business case to continue our conversation.

So our next question was "Why do traditional training programs not deliver sustainable change in these areas?" We came up with a number of reasons that can be grouped into three implicit yet misleading myths:

Myth 1: Teaching equals learning. Many traditional training programs are still subject-focused and expert-driven. They revolve around what the teacher (professor or consultant) knows to be 'the truth' about whatever the topic is; the teacher lectures, occasionally asks rhetorical questions, shows slide after slide and basically "PowerPoints" most of the 'trainees' to daydream or disengage. This kind of experience is like drinking out of a fire hydrant with little time allowed for swallowing (reflecting).

This learning philosophy is based upon the faulty notion that most students are primarily interested in what the experts have to say. Bernice McCarthy has developed a fairly simple yet validated learning framework, 4MAT, based upon the work of David Kolb. She has identified four basic learning styles and the questions they prefer to ask. Type 1 Learners are more interested in the question "Why?"; they want to understand the purpose, outcomes, rationale and reason for taking the time now to learn whatever *it* is. Type 2 Learners are more interested in the "What?" question; they want to know what the experts think, their theories and what the textbooks say. Type 3 Learners are more interested in the "How?" question; they're interested in the steps, tools, techniques and processes that make something work. And Type 4 Learners are more interested in the "So what?" question; they're pragmatic and interested in application and adaptation. If it's true that traditional training programs focus more on Type 2 Learners, they lose the attention and engagement of the "Why?", "How?" and "So What?" Learners – roughly three quarters of us.

Myth 2: Relevance can wait until application. All too often, the teacher is more concerned with the lesson and correct answers than the learner and his/her questions and experiences. The heavy reliance upon case studies and simulations often precludes the opportunity to explore the current challenges and questions faced by most learners. Very little time is devoted to reflection and dialogue. Because the teacher "has the answers" there's really no need for the 'students' to explore their own experiences, exchange their insights, make their own meaning and identify and explore

those emerging questions that are important to them.

A number of years ago I facilitated a 5-day leadership development program for superintendents and headmasters from international schools around the world. I told them in advance that the only 'experts' in this program would be themselves and the curriculum would be driven by their questions. On Monday morning within a couple of hours we created our agenda for the week by identifying those questions that they wanted to explore in the area of leadership. The question-owner became the session leader; for each session they captured the essence of the dialogue and the result was a book on leadership created by them – a chapter for each day. We had a number of reflection and dialogue sessions sprinkled throughout the 5 days to dive deeper into emerging questions coming out of each session. The unanimous evaluation was that this was the best leadership development program they had ever participated in. The reason was simple – it was driven by their questions and their experiences; the program was theirs.

Myth 3: Once you've seen it, you can do it. The 'If you can see, you can do' approach to training is based on the premise that if someone is exposed to a new way of thinking, automatically s/he will behave differently. We know this doesn't work and yet we continually run into training programs that operate this way. In sports, music, theatre and space exploration we know that practice is required and although it may not make perfect, it certainly leads us in that direction. The faulty logic we often hear is that since 'time is money', we can't afford to take highly paid professionals away from work for very long periods of time. So what happens is that we try to do more with less and sacrifice transfer and transformation -- two key outcomes. If we can't afford to invest in the time it takes for individuals and teams to go through the learning cycle, then we're really throwing money away. Only when new behaviors become second nature will learning last and be sustained. And only then will the real value of learning be realized. As the old adage goes, "You get what you pay for".

We then looked at the opposite side of the coin and asked, "What are the learning principles that encourage or lead to transformation – learning that lasts?"

We identified seven principles that support *learning that lasts*:

1) *Most wisdom lies within.* Rather than assuming that the teacher (consultant or expert) knows what is best; we begin the other way around; the student (individual or team) knows what is best. So the challenge is to help the student discover the wisdom within. Questions, observations and good coaching practices help an individual discover insights, lessons and solutions. Because the wisdom and the solution come from the individual there is greater ownership and a much better chance for implementation. And once an individual becomes aware of the simplicity and power of asking questions as a means of discovering one's own answers, s/he can transfer this insight and coaching practice on to colleagues, direct reports, friends and family.

2) *A systemic approach increases the relevance.* We have discovered that it is both possible and desirable to design learning interventions where outcomes are achieved at five levels -- business; organizational; team; professional; personal. This systemic approach increases the relevance so that the business, the organization, the team and the individual all benefit. The business, organizational and team challenges become the learning arena for developing teamwork, leadership and individual skills. Business problems get resolved; savings and/or earnings often result. Organizational challenges, be they cultural or structural, are also addressed. And in the process individuals and teams discover the key processes, steps, skills, concepts, tools and techniques that lead to high performance. There is no need for case studies or simulations. Nothing is better than real life.

Many companies today are using this action learning approach to develop their business and their people at the same time. A few years ago I was working with a recently merged commercial chocolate company that used the Action Reflection Learning (ARL)^{TM} approach to integrate and develop its key change leaders, create a new corporate culture and work on potential synergies that were the reason for the merger in the first place. The key change leaders, 24 per program, came from different functions, regions and former companies. They worked in teams on pre-selected corporate business challenges. By the end of the 4-week program which was spread over 8 months they had solved key business challenges resulting in millions dollars of savings or earnings; and along the way they learned about teamwork, cross-cultural communications, their new company's culture and themselves. This is what we refer to as *Earning While Learning*^{TM}.

3)   *Just in time learning is more practical than just in case training.* Learning Coaches rather than teachers support learning by looking for just in time learning opportunities as they occur in the midst of working on normal business challenges. Learning Coaches have a 'contract' with an individual or team to stop the 'work' periodically when a learning moment 'appears' and reflect with the team or individual on what is going on and introduce an appropriate concept, tool or technique that the team can immediately apply.

I was working as a Learning Coach with a team of bankers in another ARL program. During a session run by the VP for Strategy I observed 'my team' in action. The VP asked the 4 different project teams to huddle for 5 minutes and come up with a recommendation to a question she gave them. As soon as my team had pulled themselves into a circle, Bob, one member of my team took charge and began to give his answer. After about 3 minutes he paused for breath and Janet who had been waiting for such a pause jumped in and used up the remaining 2 minutes. When the VP said, "Time's up!" and asked for the teams to briefly summarize their findings, Bob was on his feet before we knew it. As you might have guessed, Bob gave his own answer and didn't even incorporate Janet's. I observed the body language of my team and knew I had a learning opportunity sitting right in front of me.

When the session was over we went back to our team room to work on our project. Before they got started I asked my team if they were interested in a quick reflection on how the strategy session went. Everyone was eager. I asked them to reflect on a simple question: "How do you feel about how our team did?" After a minute's reflection I suggested that Bob go first. He was proud of his team's response feeling that they had come up with the best answer of all the teams. Janet was upset to say the least and complained that Bob neglected to incorporate any of her thoughts into his response. The other members of the team felt completely left out since they didn't even have a chance to speak up during the 5-minute huddle.

At that point I asked them if they were interested in how they might have better used their 5 minutes so that everyone had a chance to speak. Of course, they were curious. I said, "What if you had taken the first minute to reflect and jot down two or three points for the VP's question. Then each of you could take 30 seconds and simply report your thinking; that would take 3 minutes. Then in the last minute you could quickly appoint one of you using the appointment method (on the count of 3 everyone points to the person on the team they want to summarize for the team; the person with the most fingers pointing his/her way is appointed) and that person could get his thoughts together."

They liked the concept and tried it out immediately in their next work session. After a while it became a regular practice. This technique allowed the extraverts to edit, the introverts to think

and gave everyone equal opportunity to participate. There was much better listening and better thinking as a result. The best learning moment is in the moment of need.

4) ***Design learning interventions that address different learning styles.*** By addressing different learning styles, everyone is challenged and everyone finds some degree of comfort. This can very simply be achieved by ensuring that every session of a learning intervention addresses these four questions:

(1) Why are we doing "this" now? (Purpose, Outcomes, and Rationale);
(2) What exactly will we be doing? (Content, Theory, and Activity);
(3) How will we do it? (Processes, Tools, and Techniques);
(4) So what can I take back home? (Applications, Adaptations, Implications).

Then one can ensure that there is variety in the learning environments – stand up meetings, walking meetings, table meetings, circle meetings, inside and outside meetings, small group work sessions, dyads, triads, reflection and dialogue sessions, etc. One of the most memorable sessions I can remember was a 'walk and talk' after lunch – usually the most difficult hour of the day – where the group split into duets and went for a walk and discussed a difficult organizational challenge. When everyone returned they were refreshed and had some very innovative suggestions. Variety is the spice of life.

5) ***Both appreciative and constructive feedback are needed.*** Studies show that appreciative feedback leads to repetition of the behavior being addressed. Constructive feedback when invited and given in the spirit of development can also lead to changed behavior. Some of the most effective feedback is self generated. So the simple question, "What do you think worked well and why?" can lead to insights that reinforce good behavior. And then the follow up question, "How could we improve?" (**not** "What went wrong?"), leads to innovation and continual improvement rather than blame or guilt.

6) ***Repeating, adapting, transferring and modeling reinforce the learning and expand the impact.*** Riding a bicycle, learning to talk, and playing the piano all require repetition. So it is with teamwork and leadership behaviors. Moving from awareness to mastery requires discipline and practice. Once is not enough. Taking the insights 'back home' to adapt and apply them in other settings is the final measure of learning that lasts. In fact, why learn something that you can't or won't apply? Research has shown that after a week, retention is about 10% of what one simply hears. If the individual listens and writes down the key points the retention increases to about 25%. If the individual listens, records and passes the message along to others the retention almost doubles to 50%. However, if the individual, in addition to all the above, also tries out the new behavior the retention jumps to around 80%. So listen, record, transfer and try out. Be the change you want.

7) ***Measurement metrics and rewards lead to sustained performance.*** If you both measure and reward the behavior desired the chances are you will get sustained performance. The opposite is also true. It is well worth the time to establish good metrics and establish a fair and motivating reward system for the behaviors you want. And an individual and a team can establish their own metrics and rewards. The greater the ownership, the greater the motivation.

Upon reflection we concurred that there are many things we can all do to increase the likelihood that learning lasts and a few things we can avoid. We welcome your reflections, questions and insights.

What to you think?