PART ONE

FOUNDATIONS OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

THIS FIRST SECTION of *The Handbook of Experiential Learning* contains three chapters. Each addresses an issue that underpins the design and facilitation of effective experiential learning. The authors are thought leaders in the field of experiential learning.

Chapter 1, "Changing Attitudes and Behaviors Through Experiential Activity," examines the ultimate purpose of experiential learning. While training is often viewed as a means toward *self-awareness* and *acquisition of knowledge and skills,* its overriding goal is *change.* While no training program or intervention can ever be expected, by itself, to produce real change, casting such a vision when it is first designed and later implemented is crucial. The author argues that experiential learning activities are critical to that mission. It contains a five-step model of change and illustrates how experiential learning activities contribute to each step of the model.

Chapter 2, "Theoretical Foundations of Experiential Learning," discusses some of the fundamental cognitive processes necessary for the design and delivery of tools supporting experiential learning. One of the main points of the chapter is that the comprehension of learning content is best driven by a story framework for the to-be-learned material. The chapter ends with brief examples to showcase these ideas in action.

Chapter 3, “Dynamic Debriefing,” covers several aspects of the reflection phase of experiential learning. Among the topics are the role of the facilitator in debriefing, the ways in which debriefing activities can be sequenced, and variety of debriefing tools. Central to the chapter is the notion that debriefing can be a dynamic process if it is carefully designed.

CHAPTER ONE

CHANGING ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVITY

Mel Silberman

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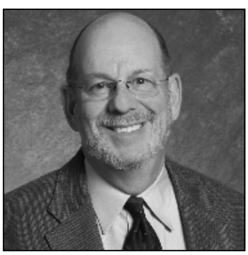

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IN EVERY ORGANIZATION, there are attitudes and behaviors among leaders and employees that reduce its effectiveness. These attitudes and behaviors cluster in what I would call "arenas of change." Following are six arenas in which uncertainties, tensions, and resistance often occur:

1. Customer Service

Any organization that must attract and retain its customers needs its members to embrace a customer orientation. If customers are seen as individuals to be taken for granted or merely tolerated, those customers will become dissatisfied and go elsewhere with their business. Moreover, an indifferent stance toward customers is dangerous, even in circumstances under which customers do not have a choice as to where a need is obtained. This typically occurs in the public sector, such as with a governmental agency, a public educational institution, and so forth. Not happy with their experience, customers become less appreciative and hence less supportive of the organization.

2. Safety

Safety is a paramount concern in any organization where harmful events can happen to employees and customers. To ensure safety, procedures have to be followed that minimize danger. (A simple example is the wearing of a hard hat at a construction site.) Often, these procedures are unappealing. They may create personal discomfort, add time and stress to work assignments, and require extensive knowledge acquisition and training.

3. Teamwork

Much of an organization's work occurs through small teams. Unfortunately, collaboration does not come easily. It takes a long time for a team to become high-performing. Also, it is often frustrating to work effectively with others, and many people prefer to "do it myself." Individual styles and temperaments also interfere with teamwork. If a person is impatient or needs personal space to be effective, he or she will be a hindrance to a project team.

4. Process Improvement

In order to improve quality and efficiency, many organizations need to rethink how they do things. The rub is that most people don't like change. They are used to "business as usual," preferring the familiarity of continually doing things the way they've always been done. Furthermore, they are afraid of the risks involved in committing to what's not yet been "proven." Some hold back, and others actively resist the changes being suggested or mandated.

5. Diversity

Increasingly, the workplace has become more culturally diverse in terms of differences in gender, race, ethnicity, country of origin, special needs, age, and many other aspects. The mix can make some people uncomfortable. Some people find it difficult to understand people who act, speak, and perhaps value things differently than they do. Moreover, status issues abound. Who's in the majority? Who's in the minority? Who are the leaders? Who are the followers?

6. Role Expectations

Traditional roles of managers and employees allowed for clear expectations. One group were the leaders and the other the followers. Nowadays, employees are encouraged to be self-directing learners, to take greater initiative, and are empowered to make more decisions on their own. In turn, managers are expected to be coaches, team leaders, and facilitators, as opposed to controllers. This change in role expectations leads to confusion and resistance in many organizations. Even when the change is embraced, people are not sure how to adapt.

The Steps in Changing Attitudes and Behaviors

If you are charged with the responsibility to help promote change in the arenas just cited (or in many additional ones), you need a process that will guide your efforts. I would like to suggest a five-step process:

1. Creating Openness
2. Promoting Understanding
3. Considering New Attitudes and Behaviors
4. Experimenting
5. Obtaining Support

Creating Openness

The first challenge is to "get your foot in the door," as opposed to "getting the door slammed in your face." Recognizing that the people you are hoping to change may be resistant to your efforts, you want to be seen as open and trustworthy, without an agenda that imposes change. In these initial attempts to build receptiveness to change, the first order of business is to get people to feel open to getting their concerns "out on the table" and to validate them. It's important for people to realize that you are interested in their feelings and points of view and that you see these as real for them. That can't happen unless they feel safe enough to express themselves and you can empathize with their feelings and acknowledge the kernels of truth in what they believe. Here are some concerns that might surface if you do this.

Trying to understand someone who is difficult implies that you're sympathetic or even forgiving. When interpersonal skills training encourages participants to "seek to understand before being understood," some participants are concerned that doing so will give a person who has done something unacceptable the impression that the behavior is OK. These participants have difficulty seeing that understanding does not imply acceptance. Rather, it is an attempt to figure out the best way to deal with people instead of writing them off or being angry with them.

Some safety procedures do not really protect us. Sometimes, employees object to safety requirements, such as wearing ear plugs to avoid hearing injuries, because they may lead to other problems, such as not being able to hear a co-worker.

Customers get the idea that they can treat us any way they want. Such a conclusion is often the belief of participants in a customer-service training program in a context in which they have already experienced considerable abuse from customers.

The team concept means that you can't take any initiative without checking in with others. Often, people resist team training because they think it will rob them of personal control.

If beliefs such as those just cited are freely aired, it is now possible to examine them and perhaps find non-threatening ways to challenge the assumptions behind them. This creates some openness to considering new attitudes and behaviors. If, instead, these attitudes and behaviors are simply "urged" by the training program, they may fall on deaf ears.

Promoting Understanding

Once participants are open to examining and challenging their beliefs, they will be more willing to accept new information and make shifts in the way they see things.

For example, people previously resistant to team work may now be open to the fact that it takes a while for a team to form, storm, norm, and eventually perform. As a result, they may become more patient about the trials and tribulations of their own work teams. Or customer service trainees may now become impressed by the fact that less than 10 percent of all unhappy customers complain. They come to realize that active attempts to assist customers and obtain feedback from them is vital to an organization's ability to retain them as clients. Or participants may be made more open to seeking feedback from their boss when they become aware that such an action is often viewed favorably. Seeking feedback (but not fishing for compliments) shows that you are interested in your own development and want to take the initiative in improving your performance.

Considering New Attitudes and Behaviors

The next step is to invite participants to engage in experiences in which they see new attitudes and behaviors in action. Those experiences can be had through a variety of methods, from real-world activities to simulated ones. When well-crafted and well-debriefed, these experiences can often develop a positive motivation to try out new ways.

Typically, participation in these experiences needs to feel safe. While it is important to eventually up the challenge level to master new approaches and skills, participants tend to be more open to exploring new ones if they don't feel judged or embarrassed as they "try them on for size." They also need some time and space to get used to them. Therefore, rushing this stage often leads to resistance.

Experimenting

If the experiences in the previous step have been insightful, motivating, and confidence-building, then the work of change can really go forward. At this juncture (usually when the training is over or between sessions), people can select new activities and commit themselves to applying them back on the job. I like to suggest that this process be called "an experiment in change" instead of the more mundane term "action plan." People are more open to this back-on-the-job application if *they* view it as an experiment in which they find out how useful the new attitude or skill is to *them*. We shouldn't kid ourselves. Most people will not persist with a change unless they find that it is successful. Experimenting allows people to test their wings and find initial success to sustain themselves for further application.

Often, people leave a good training program with so much enthusiasm that they make the mistake of going for broke and then fizzle out when results don't come quickly. Therefore, it's vital to encourage participants to try on a small change first and see what happens. *Less is more.*

Obtaining Support

Changes don't last unless they are "lived." Even if people are pumped up about a change in attitude or behavior, they usually find that, while making some headway, they quickly relapse. Real change comes only by overcoming obstacles that are in the way in our daily lives.

In this last critical step, people need help in identifying their ongoing needs for support. In particular, they need help in identifying the assistance they need and how to request it and maintain it.

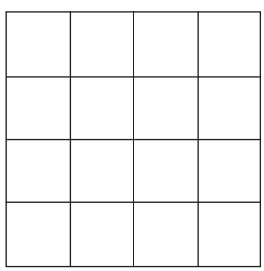
The Role of Experiential Activity in the Change Process

The five-step process just described usually doesn't happen through conversation alone. Participants will not air their concerns, examine their beliefs, become open to new information, consider new attitudes and behaviors, try them out and seek support to sustain them merely by convening them for group discussion. In my experience, the process gets off to the best start and is sustained by well-designed and well-placed experiential activities.

Creating Openness

In the *creating openness* stage, short games and exercises are the ticket for "getting your foot in the door." Let me illustrate with the classic team exercise: Broken Squares. Participants are placed in groups of five members. Each member is given an envelope containing between two and four shapes. The job of each individual is to form a six-inch square, a task that cannot be accomplished unless participants give each other some of their shapes. The hitch is that no one can speak during the exercise or point to any shapes he or she wants from other group members. In the ensuing minutes, many things typically occur that block the group from success. The brilliance of the exercise is that it is not simply about cooperation and sharing. Participants come face-to-face with feelings of impatience, frustration, and pessimism that mimic emotions that most people feel in team situations. Because of that fact, it's a great way to get on the table everyone's feelings about the possibilities and risks of collaboration.

Another excellent example, using squares, of an experiential starter exercise is Count the Squares. In this exercise, participants are shown a large square divided evenly into sixteen cells (themselves squares) and asked: How many squares are there?



Most people respond with the answer sixteen, but a few shout out seventeen because they include both the one large square and the sixteen small squares. Eventually, participants realize that you can divide the large square into four quadrants and obtain four more "squares." Then it hits some people that you can adjust the way you find quadrants (2 × 2 cells) and identify five more "squares." Finally, people see that there are four "squares" containing nine cells each (3 × 3 cells), culminating in a count of thirty squares. This process can lead to many interesting learning points:

- There's more than meets the eye.
- Our assumptions block our view of things.
- Some people see things that others do not.
- Big problems have lots of small parts.

Such points can be related to examining feelings and beliefs on such topics as feedback, problem solving, teamwork, and more.

The opening experience can also be longer in length. Starting a cross-cultural training program, for example, with a rich simulation such as Bafa' Bafa' (developed by Garry Shirts, one of the contributors to this handbook) is a great way to prepare people being transferred abroad for the frustrations, joys, and insights that come from contact with a foreign culture. In Bafa' Bafa', participants are separated into two groups. Each group becomes a culture and is instructed in the culture's values and traditions. The two groups then exchange "ambassadors," who observe the other group and return to report on what they have learned about its culture. After consultation time, a different set of ambassadors is exchanged with the charge of interacting with the culture being visited. The game provides an excellent chance to help participants focus on what they consider normal, how they act within their own inner circle, and how they interact with strangers. They usually spend an hour in the simulation and then up to five hours discussing how stereotypes are formed and perpetuated.

Broken Squares, Count the Squares, and Bafa' Bafa' are but three of hundreds of games, simulations, and other published experiential activities available to trainers. The key is to select those that are rich in experiential learning and provide a variety of discussion opportunities for *creating openness.* (Naturally, you can create your own.)

Promoting Understanding

Most people would think that the *promoting understanding* phase would be the time for direct teaching, using primarily lecture and discussion. This might be true if the only concern were delivering key points and key information to participants. The beauty of experiential activities is how well they can be used to illuminate ideas so that their meaning is heightened. For example, imagine a trainer giving a brief lecture summarizing the problems managers face today, including low productivity, poor quality of service, high stress, and low morale. The trainer wants to point out that traditional management solutions tend to use an approach that, like the mythological Hydra, often generates two new heads for every one solved. A different approach is needed, which she calls "creating the ideal." At this point, the trainer interrupts the lecture with an exercise. She asks each participant to find a partner of approximately equal weight and strength. One of the pair is asked to hold out his or her arm horizontally and to resist the partner's attempts to bend it. Most arms are easily bent. The trainer then requests the individual to imagine his or her arm as a steel rod before the partner attempts to bend it and to sustain the vision in the process. In most pairs, arms remain straight despite increased effort from the partners. The trainer then continues: "Better results are obtained with less effort. The key is what one focuses on. In the first case, the individual tried to achieve contradictory results: keeping his or her arm straight and resisting having it bent. In the second case, he or she focused solely on the desired result." The trainer then presents four key elements that go into making a visionary approach to problem solving work.

The kind of understanding that a participant might want to promote is often more affective in nature rather than cognitive. A good illustration is any experiential activity that seeks to help participants internalize their understanding of someone else's situation. One of the best ways to "get into someone else's shoes" is to create an activity that simulates that unfamiliar person or situation. Begin by choosing a type of person or situation that you want participants to learn about. You may elect to have participants experience what it is like to be any of the following:

- In the "minority"
- In a different age group
- From a different culture
- A person with special problems or challenges
- In a demanding job

Then, create a way to simulate that person or situation. Among the ways to do this are the following:

- Have participants dress in the attire of that person or situation. Or have them handle the equipment, props, accessories, or other belongings of that person or situation or engage in a typical activity.

- Place participants in situations in which they are required to respond in the role of the character they have been given.
- Impersonate an individual and ask the participants to interview you and find out about your experiences, views, and feelings.
- Use an analogy to build a simulation. Create a scenario familiar to participants that sheds light on an unfamiliar situation. (You might, for instance, ask all participants in your class who are left-handed to portray people who are culturally different from the rest of the participants.)

An example of this is Instant Aging. This simulation is designed to sensitize participants to sensory deprivation and the normal process of aging. Participants are given eyeglasses smeared with Vaseline®, dried peas to put in their shoes, cotton for their ears, and latex gloves for their hands. Each participant is then asked to take out a pencil and paper and write down his or her name, address, telephone number, any medication currently being taken, and any known allergies. Next, the participants are told to take a walk outside the training session, first opening the door and then finding their way around. The simulation involves further directions concerning the specific details of the tasks participants are asked to perform and how they are to take turns assisting each other.

Considering New Attitudes and Behaviors

In the stage of *considering new attitudes and behaviors,* experiential activity is well neigh essential. The goal here is to introduce participants experientially to those actions you would like them to consider and, you hope, eventually adopt. A wide variety of experiential methodologies can now be utilized. Let's look at a few examples.

Games and simulations can be used to test the behavioral style and performance of participants. Playing a game at the beginning of a course allows the trainer to identify the styles and skills that already exist and those that need to be strengthened. Playing a game at the end of the course enables the trainer to assess the instructional experience. Take, for example, a simulation exercise called Desert Survival. Players are told that their plane has crashed in the desert, that their only priority is to survive, and that only certain items are available to them. In the first part of the game, players must decide how to survive individually. Then the game is replayed, with groups working toward team consensus. A trainer could include this simulation exercise at the beginning of a course on team building to assess how well teams work toward consensus. Near the end of the course, a similar exercise, such as Winter Survival, could be employed to measure progress in teamwork.

Games and simulations can also be used to create performance challenges for participants. For example, in a game called Go to Market, participants receive roles in a fictional company that is bringing a product to market and must figure out how to avoid certain management pitfalls in order to beat a competitor with a similar product to market. In another example using a supply-chain simulation, participants are put in charge of a cell phone company. They must select a model of cell phone to produce and suppliers to manufacture them, forecast demand, and react to news and events affecting the cell phone marketplace. At the end of the simulation, participants face the financial results of their decisions and a performance review by the company's board of directors.

Visualization is an interesting method to employ if you want participants to consider a new course of action without having to actually do it first. The following visualization exercise is used in a training program on Dealing with Difficult People.

1. Acknowledge that coping with especially difficult people is a challenge.
2. Invite participants to identify difficult people in their lives and pick one. Then ask them to close their eyes (or use some other focusing technique) and imagine the worst thing that this person could say to them (e.g., "You don't care").
3. Next, direct participants to bring to mind their first reaction to that statement, one that reveals how they might respond if the other person "pushed a button" or "struck a nerve." Give an example of your own to guide their thoughts.
4. Continue the imagery experience by directing participants to take a deep breath and then to imagine acknowledging what the person said, even if it was stated offensively. Suggest the response, "I can sense how angry you are." Next, direct participants to imagine asking the other person to be more specific about the complaint. Suggest the request, "Tell me more about what you want from me or what you are feeling about me." Have them imagine a positive response to their query.
5. End the imagery experience and ask participants to identify which suggestions were helpful and which they wished to question.
6. Remind participants that difficult people typically have trouble managing their own stress and tend to attack whoever is accessible. Taking their statements personally allows you to be a victim.
7. Obtain reactions to this observation.

In-basket assignments are a form of the project method in which letters, memos, phone messages, and so forth are given to the participant playing an assigned role. The participant is then given time to write actual responses to the items in her or his in-basket. This assignment below could be used in its present form as part of a time management program for managers.

For the purpose of this exercise, you are to assume the role of Pat Ladder, manager of the operations department in the J.R. Jones Company. As manager of the operations department, you report to the division head, Kelly MacDonald. The following people report to you:

- Jamie White, secretary
- Mike Crossman, facilities maintenance supervisor
- Linda Stevens, property and supplies supervisor
- Stan Powell, security supervisor
- Jay Snyder, transportation supervisor

All of them are capable people and have been in their respective jobs one year or more. The situation this exercise deals with is as follows.

Today is Monday, December 14. You have been away for several days, so you have come into your office at 8:00 A.M. (early) to catch up and get ready for the day. The normal working day begins at 8:30 A.M. Promptly at 8:30 A.M., you must leave to attend a training meeting. Therefore, you only have about thirty minutes to organize your work, and you want to get as much done as possible. You do not expect to return to your office from the meeting until 10:00 A.M. As you reach your desk at 8:00 A.M., you find items in your in-basket.

As you go through the material, take whatever action is needed, assuming that you are Pat Ladder. Use your own experience as a basis for your decisions.

Make notes to yourself or to others by writing directly on the message, letter, or memo or by attaching notes (use notepaper provided by the facilitator). Draft or write letters and memos where appropriate. Note any phone calls you plan to make, including information about when you plan to make the call and whom you plan to call. Note follow-up dates when further action is necessary. Write on the items themselves where you want them sent, such as "Follow up 12/15" or "File."

After the exercise, you will have an opportunity to compare your actions with others in the group. Remember:

- Put yourself in the position of Pat Ladder.
- Today is December 14.
- You have come in before regular working hours. There is no one else available to help or call.
- You want to get as much out of the way as possible in the thirty minutes you have to spend organizing.
- Record (make mention of) every action you make or intend to make.
- Be prepared to discuss how you handled the exercise with the group.

In-basket methodology can also be utilized in more extensive activities. A superb example is the Looking Glass Inc. simulation training created by the Center for Creative Leadership. A full description of Looking Glass is found in Chapter 18 in this handbook.

Role playing is a staple in any trainer's repertoire in the *considering new attitudes and behaviors* process. (See Chapter 11 in this handbook for an in-depth discussion of role playing as an experiential learning strategy.) It is the best-known way to help participants both experience certain feelings and practice certain skills. Let's say, for example, that your training objective is to have participants get in touch with their feelings about confronting others (something many supervisors and, indeed, people in general, avoid). You can set up a dramatic situation in which participants are required to confront someone else and then discuss the feelings generated by the role-playing experience. In addition, you can design a role-playing exercise to enable participants to practice constructive methods of confrontation.

You have many choices when designing role-playing exercises. One set of choices has to do with the *scripting* of the drama. Scripting is concerned with the development of roles and the situation in which the drama is placed. Here are six options:

1. *Improvisation.* Participants can be given a general scenario and asked to fill in the details themselves. This approach promotes spontaneity and the opportunity to gear the scenario to one's own work experience. Because the situation is not clearly outlined, however, participants may have difficulty creating details on their own.

   Example: "Let's imagine that you are at a restaurant and your order is overcooked. Let's have Mary be that customer and request that the order be redone. What if Frank is the waiter and he gives the customer a hard time? Mary, you will try to persuade the waiter to redo the order. I'd like to see you both use all the skills we've been practicing so far."
2. *Prescribed roles.* Participants can be given a well-prepared set of instructions that state the facts about the roles they are portraying and how they are to behave. This approach gives you the most control over the script, so the dramatic tension you want to create is easily obtainable. However, participants may not identify with the roles and situation you have developed or they may get lost if the scenario is too complex.

   Example: "You are an accountant for an insurance company. You have been with the company since your graduation from college three years ago. You really like the company, feel you are doing well, and are looking forward to a promotion. You like your work except for writing letters, memos, and notes on your accounting reports. You've never admitted it to anyone, but you've always had difficulty in English. Your manager has just called you in. You're afraid it might be about your writing. You'll admit your deficiency only if your manager seems genuinely interested and concerned; otherwise, you will make up excuses."

3. *Semi-prescribed roles.* Participants can be given information about the situation and the characters to be portrayed, but not told how to handle the situation. By not prescribing how characters are to behave, this approach provides greater latitude for the participants. Some of them, however, may create a scenario different from what the trainer intended.

   Example: "You are a recently appointed supervisor of a support engineering group that has overall responsibility for maintaining and improving test equipment hardware and software at its repair centers. There are twenty engineers, differing widely in age and experience with the company. Each engineer is responsible for a specific list of test equipment. Until now, staff members have not been called on to work on test equipment that is not on their designated lists. This has meant that, when one of them is sick or on vacation or has a priority assignment, it is difficult for anyone else to take up the slack.

   "You have decided to assemble a small team within the group to develop Support Test Equipment Protocols (STEPs) that will provide the information necessary to support the various pieces of test equipment. With these STEPs, you will be able to establish a rotation system within the group. The people you have invited to be on the team include two senior project engineers and two hardware and software technicians.

   "This is the first meeting of the group. Begin the meeting."

4. *Replay of life.* Participants can portray themselves in situations they have actually faced. This approach has the advantage of bringing the most realism to the drama. However, it can be difficult to re-create the actual situation and the role play may then flounder.

   Example: "I'd like each of you to think about the last time you gave a performance appraisal. Tell your role-playing partner what generally happened and reenact the situation, the first time keeping to the approach you took when you actually gave the appraisal and the second time altering your approach to include the suggestions I have demonstrated."

5. *Participant-prepared skits.* Participants can be asked to develop a role-playing vignette of their own. This approach provides them with time to create a role play and gives them a chance to rehearse before a final performance. Participants will respond especially well to this approach if they are invited to address their real-life problems and incorporate them into the skits. However, some of the spontaneity of the previous options is lost.

   Example: "I'd like you and your partner to take the three management styles we've just discussed and create a skit that shows a manager using each of the styles while giving project instructions to an employee. Base your skit on your own experiences. Take about ten minutes to prepare your skits. When you're ready, let me know and we will take a look at what you've come up with."

6. *Dramatic readings.* Participants can be given a previously prepared script to act out. This approach creates the least anxiety of any of the previous options and allows the least skill practice.

   Example: "Here is a script of an exit interview. It demonstrates very effectively some of the problems and some of the solutions we've been examining. In your pairs, one will be the interviewer and the other will be the employee who is leaving the company. Read your parts aloud to get a feel for the tension and relief experienced in the situation."

Of course, a trainer has the option of combining these scripted choices. For example, participants could be asked to read a script and then act out the same drama without the script in front of them. Or they could be allowed to prepare their own scenario, followed by a trainer-prepared scenario. Mixing options in this manner helps to minimize the disadvantages of any single option.

After a role-playing exercise, remember to hold a reflective discussion or review of the role play and/or to giving performance feedback to the role players.

When using role playing as a form of skill practice, the classic way is to do a "show-and-tell" demonstration before asking participants to try it themselves. A more "active" approach is to demonstrate a skill, but with little or no explanation. Instead of telling participants what you are doing, you are asking them to observe carefully the demonstration and tell you what you did. This strategy encourages participants to be mentally alert.

Decide on a skill you want participants to learn. Ask the participants to watch you perform the skill. Just do it, with little or no explanation or commentary about what and why you are doing what you do. (Telling the participants what you are doing will lessen their mental alertness.) Give the participants a visual glimpse of the "big picture" (or the entire skill if it involves several steps). Do not expect retention. At this point, you are merely establishing readiness for learning. Then form the participants into pairs. Demonstrate the first part of the skill, with little or no explanation or commentary. *Ask pairs to discuss with each other what they observed you doing.* Obtain a volunteer to explain what you did. If the participants have difficulty following the procedure, demonstrate again. Acknowledge correct observations. Have the pairs practice with each other the first part of the skill. When it is mastered, proceed with a silent demonstration of the remaining steps, following each part with paired practice. At the end, have participants perform the entire sequence from beginning to end.

If you have the opportunity to teach one participant a skill, you can also use the "show-but-not-tell" approach, but be sure to make the participant comfortable by asking questions such as: "What did you see me do?" "What else did I do?" "Would you like me to show you again?"

Once participants can perform a skill on their own with your assistance, challenge them to redo the skill all by themselves (from beginning to end if it involves more than one step). If you have given them any learning aid that shows them what to do, ask them to put the aid away and try the skill without it.

This is an ideal time to pair up participants as "practice partners." Invite participants to demonstrate to their partners how to perform the skill in question. Using practice pairs, participants feel challenged but not threatened by having to perform under the watchful eye of the trainer or of the entire class.

You can also invite participants who can perform a skill to serve as peer tutors for participants who are still struggling. Be sure that the tutor does not seek to show off rather than assist. Remind tutors that the participants they are helping must be able to do the skill by themselves. Merely showing fellow participants what to do or correcting their performance will not get the job done.

You might also up the challenge by requiring participants to perform a skill after a period of time has intervened and the skill might be forgotten. For example, after helping participants in a business writing class to apply one grammatical rule, you might go on and help them learn several other rules. The challenge you can provide is to have them use a rule they learned a while back without any reminders from you.

Experimenting

In the *experimenting* phase, the experiential activity is no longer simulated or for practice only. It's real-time, on-the-job. As I have suggested earlier, this is the opportunity to engage participants in what I call "experiments in change." Ideal experiments in change are doing activities that the participants have already rehearsed in the prior phase and now are selected for a tryout in the real world. Here is a list of experiments of change suggestions for participants who have been part of a program called "How to Contribute to Your Team's Success."

Select one these "experiments in change" to do within the next week.

- *Involving Others:* Make a list of thing you do independently of others at work. Examine the list and identify items where it would be helpful if you involved others rather than doing things alone. Approach individuals whose expertise or assistance might benefit you and invite them to collaborate with you. Evaluate the results.

- *Promoting Team Leadership:* If you are a leader of a team, examine your leadership style. Think about how you could become a more team-oriented leader. Consider possibilities such as developing a common vision in the group, connecting staff members with each other, and asking for input on policy and procedure. Does your staff respond positively?
- *Facilitating Teamwork:* If you are a member of a group that you would like to see improve, suggest using interactive discussion formats and creative approaches to problem solving. Identify roles that you could play to help facilitate teamwork, such as heading a subcommittee, publishing group accomplishments, or even leading a meeting.
- *Observing Team Dynamics:* Take the time to notice how your team operates. Do people listen to each other? Is there equal opportunity for participation? Perhaps someone has been excluded. Perhaps someone has a good idea, but it's not expressed well. Perhaps the team is on a tangent or caught up in debate when it should be brainstorming. Based on these observations, do what you can to change these dynamics or, in the very least, share your observations with others.

Obtaining Support

In the *obtaining support* phase, there are some useful activities to help participants sustain their efforts at change. One involves having participants plan for conditions that might thwart their progress. Just as any dieter will have a hard time resisting a midnight snack, so a participant subjected to the pressures of his or her job may slip back into old ways of doing things. The most common obstacle is a lack of support from peers, supervisors, or others on the job. Another common obstacle is the lack of time to apply new skills consciously, assess how they've been used, and obtain feedback from others. In addition to offering reentry advice, a training program should build in time for participants to discuss some of the obstacles they expect to meet and ways to overcome them.

For example, a stress management trainer, concerned about the obstacles to carrying out the techniques he had taught participants, decides on an unusual strategy. Instead of giving his usual pep talk at the end of his course, he asks participants to predict the circumstances of their first moment of faltering. Using a mental imagery approach, he encouraged participants to visualize the scene in great detail. He then asked them to develop positive images of coping with the situation that they would be able to keep in their minds' eye when the predicted negative scenario began to unfold in the actual work setting.

Another activity involves self-monitoring. A well-known technique in behavior modification is to ask clients to monitor their own behaviors. For example, in a weight loss program, clients might be asked to note everything they eat, on the assumption that increased awareness will bring about greater self-control. Likewise, you could suggest to participants that they closely monitor their own behavior back on the job as a way to make training benefits last. Keeping a personal diary is one way to perform self-monitoring. The use of ready-made checklists is another approach. Whatever tools are chosen, they ideally should be tried out before the training program ends so that participants can gain comfort with the procedure and understanding of it.

In a session on time management, for example, the trainer asks the participants to brainstorm reminders to help them manage their time more effectively back on the job. Using the sentence stem "Remember to . . . ," the participants came up with the following reminders:

Remember to . . .

- Make a "to-do" list every day
- Make an appointment with myself
- Jot down notes and ideas on index cards
- Set priorities based on importance, not urgency
- Create a "to-read" file and carry it with me when I travel
- Skim books and articles quickly, looking for ideas
- Answer most letters and memos right on the item itself
- Delegate everything I possibly can to others
- Consult my list of lifetime goals once a month and review them if necessary
- Save up trivial matters for a three-hour session once a month

Participants are then asked to select the three reminders that they feel have the most relevance to them and to place them on a card to be posted in their work space.

Obtaining support efforts should include one's immediate supervisor. There are many forms in which that can take place. Here is one example used in a management development program. It involves a serious commitment on the part of the participant and others in the organization to apply what has been learned in the training program and simultaneously to benefit the organization. One of the greatest shortcomings of management development programs is the absence of any tools to measure their effectiveness. To be sure, the participants can complete an evaluation sheet that asks what they like most, least, and so on. However, such questions are not able to fully gauge the impact of training.

The only true measure of impact is the degree to which the participants retain and use the skills learned in the program. In order for this to happen, two conditions must be met:

1. The participant must work on a plan of action that spells out the specific steps for implementing change.
2. This plan is shared with the mentor and manager and supported by them.

The following ACTION PLAN is designed to assist participants in meeting these two conditions, thereby enabling both them and XYZ Company to realize a return on the investment made through participation in the program.

Many topics are covered in this module. Select a project (one of those covered or one of your own) that you plan to focus on. As you complete your ACTION PLAN, try to be as specific as possible in stating your subject. For example, if you were writing an ACTION PLAN for communication, "Written Communication" would be too broad. A more specific subject would be "Developing a Highlight Report Format for the Department."

Within the subject you have selected, state your purpose or reason for selecting it. This will be a brief description of your intent or goal. Using the example of "Developing a Highlight Report Format," the goal might look like this: "Highlight reports contain numerous details. They need to be organized so that the details appear in a logical sequence. After obtaining permission from my manager, I plan to format one of my manager's highlight reports using an eye-opener, transition 1, supporting details, transition 2, and action conclusion."

Goals are stated in broad terms; objectives are quite specific and should include measures by which your progress toward them can be determined. Objectives are the things you must achieve (deadlines, performance indexes, and so on) in order to meet your goal. Building on the same example, the objective might look like this: "To spend one day formatting a highlight report that can be used as a model for subsequent highlight reports."

To achieve your goal, you must schedule activities to move toward it. This section is your blueprint and timetable for reaching the goal. Following our example above, the activities list might look like this:

Activities	*Time*
1. Meet with mentor to explain my ACTION PLAN.	1. One morning next week, two hours.
2. Meet with my manager to explain my ACTION PLAN and obtain three latest highlight reports written by my manager.	2. One morning next week, two hours (after meeting with mentor).

3. Read over my manager's highlight reports.	3. Two hours following week.
4. Develop a format for organizing a highlight report.	4. Two hours same week as item 3.
5. After obtaining necessary highlight facts, data, and so on, write an actual highlight report for my manager.	5. Four hours before report is due.

As you carry out your schedule of activities, problems or barriers inevitably occur. Sometimes these can be anticipated in advance. Other times they may not. This section of the plan asks you to list and number all problems, present and potential, that you foresee as barriers to completing your activities.

Next, state how you plan to deal with each problem, numbering each solution to agree with the problem it addresses. Following the example, this section might look like this:

Problems	*Solutions*
1. Manager may not be able to get me all the facts and data needed to complete the actual highlight report.	1. Work directly with manager in writing highlight report.

Finally, organizations are acknowledging that follow-up coaching really helps to extend the value of training. This has been especially true in leadership training programs, where the development of key leaders is critical to the organization's future success. These individuals receive private coaching by so-called "executive" coaches who consult intensively with their clients, often focusing on those barriers that prevent them from achieving their maximum potential. Although expensive, this service can provide a strong return on investment. Other levels of the organization can benefit from coaching as well. Although not as common, group coaching is starting to be offered to personnel who are not traditionally seen as coaching clients. In small groups, participants have the opportunity for continuing practice of vital skills and for discussion of common obstacles for success. For example, after a four-day program on project management tools, participants were offered an additional four to six weeks of weekly group coaching sessions. Those who chose to attend were 95 percent more likely to use the project management tools taught in the training than those who did not attend.

Peer support groups have also proven to provide useful training follow-up. Most meet on a regular basis (e.g., monthly), often over lunch, to continue to work on course skills or issues they've encountered at work. When successful, peers support each other, from providing small suggestions on how to handle difficult situations to undertaking joint initiatives that improve the quality of their work context. For example, a support group was formed after attending a training program on meeting management. They not only shared common problems, such as how to equalize participation at meetings, but also organized a process whereby peers observed each other's meetings and provided feedback and recommendations for best practices.

Conclusion

Hopefully, a case for experiential learning as a critical aspect for supporting change has been made in this chapter. Remember the key points:

- The need for change occurs in many arenas in the workplace.
- Change is difficult.
- In order to facilitate change, look at it as a five-step process. Use that process as a framework for your planning as a facilitator of change.
- Diversify the kinds of experiential strategies you use in your design.