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MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The Impact of Excellent Instructors

> Instructors will perform with excellence if they are capable, have well-defined job roles, know what is expected of them, have the tools to do the job, and receive feedback and rewards that reinforce and develop excellent performance.

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This book is about instructor excellence. If you instruct adults, this book will enable you to deliver training in accordance with standards of excellence and will increase your competence and confidence. If you supervise instructors, it will enable you to implement a system of managing instructors that will produce excellence in the classroom. Many of the same principles apply for online learning. The practical, easy-to-use concepts described in this book will affect the way you manage yourself and others throughout your career, regardless of whether you remain in training or move into other fields of work.

In this chapter, you will look back to your own childhood experiences of learning and draw some powerful conclusions about how adults learn and the impact you can have on their learning. You will also identify how people interact and find out what causes people to perform with excellence. Finally, you will be introduced to an instructor performance system designed to enable you to produce excellence in the classroom.

The Way We Learn

Think back to your early school days. Was being a student an exhilarating experience for you? Did you feel powerful, accomplished?

Were you encouraged to learn and to participate? Did you know what you would be able to do as a result of what you would learn? Were you able to do something with what you learned? Were you recognized and rewarded for your achievements in the classroom? Did you want to emulate your teachers?

If, in recalling your early school days, you answered yes to all the preceding questions, were you able to go through school without being labeled a "brain" or a "teacher's pet"? If learning itself was an exhilarating experience, did you have to deal with strong, often unpleasant, peer pressures, as well as pressures from family and teachers?

For many adults, their early school days were an uncomfortable time in their lives. Their experience of being a student was far from exhilarating—it was a bore. Such adults recall feeling powerless or stupid. They were encouraged to behave and be quiet, rather than to learn and participate. They felt much of what they were taught was useless, and they worried about whether they would be able to do anything with what they learned. They were punished for what they did not know more often than they were rewarded for what they did know. They were referred to as "slow learners," "problem students," and "troublemakers." The last thing on earth they wanted was to be teachers.

These experiences are ones that many adults bring with them into the classroom, and they are experiences that you must grasp if you are to successfully train adults. For many adults, walking into a training room is reminiscent of their early school days. They are generally expected to sit quietly, for much too long, in chairs that are often too small or too hard. Worse yet, you might just remind them of their third-grade teacher—the one who seemed to have it in for them. They may feel uneasy or anxious about work or home, and they may fear that they're too old or too slow or too tired to learn something new. They may question whether what they are about to learn will be of any use and worry about wasting their time. They may be concerned that whatever they say will be passed on and used against them, and they may fear making fools of themselves. To top things off, they were probably forced to attend the training session.

It's easy to understand why many adults experience difficulty the moment they walk into a training room. Whether their fears are eliminated or compounded depends primarily on you, the instructor.

In a classic story on adult learning theory told in *Training* magazine some years ago, Malcolm Knowles concluded that there is really nothing terribly special about adults when it comes to learning (Feuer & Geber, 1988). Knowles asserted that adults and children are pretty much the same not only in terms of self-directedness but also in terms of their motivation, orientation, and readiness to learn. The lone distinguishing trait is the quantity and quality of their experiences. Adults bring a greater breadth and depth of experience into the classroom, and they want to be respected for it. You can do much to eliminate the difficulties adults experience in the classroom by recognizing that adults are capable learners, by respecting their experience, and by understanding how they interact.

In recent years, adults have been forced to shoulder more responsibility for their learning. For one thing, more corporations now use e-learning in which there is no instructor, and so learners must shoulder more of the responsibility for their own learning and (in a sense) must "learn" how to do that (DeRouin, Fritzsche, & Salas, 2004). The key competence of individuals is becoming the ability to learn how to learn (Rothwell, 2002). That is made all the more necessary by downsizing and other corporate actions that have eroded employee loyalty and made it necessary for individuals to seize control of their own careers. And instructors must consider individual learning styles when online learning methods are used (Barbazette, 2004).

This book was written to help instructors consider methods of presenting that take individual learning styles into account.

The Way We Interact

We want to draw from an old but classic concept, transactional analysis (Harris, 1969), to identify how people interact with one another and how these interactions can affect learning. *Transactional*

analysis (or TA, as it is commonly called) basically describes how people communicate or interact. In simple terms, TA holds that each person communicates from any of three states, called parent, adult, and child.

The *adult state* is probably the easiest to understand because it has only one form. The adult state is much like a computer. Used to present facts, logic, information, reason, and so on, the adult state is neither emotional nor judgmental. Much of training is delivered from this state.

The *parent state* has two forms. The first, which is called the *nurturing parent,* is helpful, encouraging, supportive, nourishing, and so on. This state is used to comfort people when they hurt, to encourage them to accomplish tasks despite their fears, and so on. The nurturing parent plays an important role in training because it helps participants to meet and exceed training objectives.

The other form of parent is called the *critical parent.* The critical parent is picky, judgmental, opinionated, and prejudiced. The critical parent is quick to tell people what they have done wrong. Instructors can expect trainees to occasionally communicate from their critical parent state. Instructors should avoid communicating from this state themselves, because doing so seldom accomplishes the desired training results.

There are two child states we want to talk about. The first is the *creative child,* the part of a person that is imaginative, innovative, fun-loving, free, independent, excitable, and so on. The creative child communicates with enthusiasm and strong feelings. Training is often delivered from this state. We refer to the second as the *bad-seed child.* This is the part of a person that is angry, nasty, tricky, hurt, troublesome, and so on. When the bad-seed child communicates, it is usually with strong (and sometimes hostile) emotion. Occasionally, trainees communicate from this state. Instructors who communicate from the bad-seed child state seldom accomplish the desired training results.

We'd like to give you some examples of how people communicate from these states. If we were to ask a hundred people to comment on how they might use transactional analysis in the classroom, we might

expect responses communicated from each of the above states. The adult might say, "I can apply this concept in the classroom to monitor my own communications, as well as those of participants." The nurturing parent might say, "This is a wonderful concept. It will enable me to help participants meet objectives." The critical parent might say, "This concept is over thirty years old; besides, I tried using it once, and it didn't do any good." The creative child might respond by saying, "I'm so excited about the possibilities of using TA. I can think of dozens of occasions when I could use this information." The bad-seed child might say, "I can see how to use this stuff to really annoy my boss."

When two or more people communicate, they either speak from the same state, such as adult to adult, or from different states, such as critical parent to bad-seed child. The following is an example of two people communicating from the same state (adult to adult). The instructor says, "Have you completed your homework assignment?" and the participant responds, "Yes, I completed it last night." The following is an example of two people communicating from different states (bad-seed child to critical parent). The participant says, "I don't see why we have to waste our time studying this stuff." The instructor responds by saying, "You should pay more attention, and then perhaps you won't have these problems."

There are times when each communication state is appropriate and others when it is not. For example, it is appropriate to use your critical parent to yell out to someone who is in immediate danger of being hurt. Conversely, it is inappropriate in this instance to use your nurturing parent. It is appropriate to use both your adult and creative child to solve problems; it is inappropriate to use your bad-seed child to calm down a critical parent, and vice versa (as in the example immediately above).

The key to successful communications, both in and out of the classroom, is knowing when one communication state is more appropriate to use than the others. There are three significant implications for instructors of adults:

- Learning takes place for most adults when communication between instructor and learner is adult to adult.

- Learning is often facilitated when instructors communicate from their creative child or their nurturing parent.
- Learning seldom occurs when instructors communicate from their critical parent or bad-seed child.

Again, think back to your early school days and recall a teacher who made learning an exciting experience for you. From what communication states did this teacher instruct? We suspect your answer will include adult, creative child, and probably nurturing parent. It is difficult to imagine learning taking place without communication from the adult state, as the adult is the transmitter of information, facts, data, rationales, and so on. We suspect, if the learning experience was exciting, that your teacher communicated excitement, which stems from the creative child. We imagine this teacher also encouraged and supported you in the process of learning; and encouragement and support come from the nurturing parent.

Now recall a teacher who made learning a disaster for you and ask yourself what communication states this instructor used. We bet that your answer includes critical parent. Did the experience cause you to feel angry, frustrated, foolish, or stupid? Did you feel like a bad child? The critical parent generally brings out the worst in people because it elicits the bad-seed child, just as the bad-seed child elicits the critical parent.

You can draw some valid conclusions about adult learning from your own childhood learning experiences. Just like children, adults respond well to instructors who communicate from their adult, creative child, and nurturing parent states. Unlike children, who have little power in the classroom, most adults simply won't sit still for instructors who communicate from their critical parent or bad-seed child.

Electronically mediated instruction can complicate matters, since research has shown that learners with low levels of motivation do not learn as well in some media-based instructional situations as they do in instructor-led situations (Brown, Rietz, & Sugrue, 2005).

In this book, the term *electronically mediated instruction* is used synonymously with *educational technology*, *instructional technology*, and *distance education*, and they are all understood to mean "any learning that takes place without the physical presence of the instructor with the learner" (Mantyla & Gividen, 1997, p. 4). While much attention has been devoted to electronically mediated instruction in all its forms in recent years, most of the same principles required of excellent instructors are still called for in online as well as onsite settings (Rothwell, Butler, Hunt, Li, Maldonado, Peters, & Stern, 2006).

Of course, it is dangerous to over-generalize. The reality is that electronically mediated instruction is very broad, encompassing instruction delivered by print, by PowerPoint slides attached to emails, by videotape, by videoconference, by web-based videoconference, by audiotape, by audioconference, and many more delivery venues. The role of the instructor may be somewhat different in each venue. However, instructors with the ability to deliver effectively in all media do share some common characteristics, and many of these characteristics are a focal point of the standards for instructor excellence described in this book.

Achieving Excellent Performance

Consider Powers' premise (Bob Powers, 1992) about human beings and excellence. It says that people will perform with excellence if they have well-defined jobs, are capable of doing the job, know what is expected of them, have the tools to do the job, have the necessary skills and knowledge, receive feedback on how well they perform, and perceive and receive rewards for performing as desired. This premise underlies the instructor performance system, which is a method of helping instructors to perform with excellence. The instructor performance system has seven basic components: job definition, selection, performance expectations, job tools, training, feedback, and rewards. Let's take a look at how each of these components derives from the initial premise.

Job definition is the component that defines responsibility for work. A good job definition is derived from an organization's mission or goals. It identifies areas of responsibility for attaining those goals; describes the skills, knowledge, qualifications, experience, and characteristics required to successfully carry out the job; and forms the basis for establishing performance expectations.

Selection is a system of choosing capable people to carry out a job. A good selection system draws from the job definition. It assesses candidates' skills, knowledge, qualifications, experience, and characteristics; matches these with the capabilities required to carry out the job; and selects candidates capable of successfully performing the job.

Performance standards, management by objectives, and target setting are different processes to define *performance expectations*, which also stem from the job definition. Performance standards are minimal levels of acceptable performance, while objectives and targets are statements of intended accomplishments. People will perform with excellence if they know what is expected of them.

Job tools are the resources available to reach performance expectations. These include equipment, manuals, procedures, and so on. Adequate tools ensure that people have the means to carry out their responsibilities efficiently and effectively.

Training equips people to perform as desired. A good training system will give people the skills and knowledge required to carry out their jobs.

Feedback is the process of letting people know how well they are meeting performance expectations. It includes observing, measuring, and documenting performance. A good feedback system reinforces desired performance and improves performance that does not meet expectations.

Rewards can be given when someone meets or exceeds performance expectations. Traditional job rewards include compensation, recognition, development, lateral moves, promotions, and so on. A good reward system matches the rewards to results and ensures that the rewards given are perceived to be of value by the recipient.

Each component of a performance system must be linked to the others if the system is to be successful. If you take another look at the above descriptions, you'll notice that the components are all interdependent. For example, the training component ensures that people have the skills and knowledge to do the job, the feedback component lets people know how well they are doing the job, and so on. Linking the components of the system produces a result like a finely tuned orchestra. While the parts may be exquisite on their own, working together they produce a result that simply cannot be achieved alone.

Organizations that expect excellence in performance must establish the system components necessary to support it. An incomplete performance system or one that fails to integrate all the components will not promote excellence in performance. Most organizations do have effective pieces of such a system in place. These organizations must establish the missing components and link them so that the entire system enables people to achieve the level of excellence desired. People who have worked in organizations that truly support excellence report that the experience is one they will remember for a lifetime and use as a standard for all other work experiences.

The remaining chapters of this book focus on the components of the instructor performance system. The first component—job definition—is the subject of the next chapter.