



Different Ways to Learn

The rate of change in our society is unparalleled when compared to the past. Rapid change is far outpacing our ability to learn new behaviors to keep current. One only needs to go to any business or service to find new ways to do business whether its for sales purposes, record-keeping, or speed of transaction.

Recently, on a trip to the eye doctor, the Physician's Assistant shared that virtually none of the equipment she had originally learned her trade on is even present in the office now. She shared that both she and the doctor attend training events virtually every month.

One retailer we know of decided that she is the only one who can use the new checkout computer because they are so busy she cannot find the hours necessary to train her staff and give them time to practice.

Unfortunately, there is a significant obstacle to this rapid and constant change in our workplaces. Simply stated, people don't all learn the same way. As simple as that might sound, it causes a ripple effect of challenges and management issues, especially for supervisors. If people don't all learn the same way, then the way they are trained and the time it takes to keep staff current is variable and potentially unpredictable.

Historically, the format previously of much of the training in the workplace was an extension of the training practices employees had in their schooling as children and young adults. Some students excelled in that environment, but others struggled.

For the youngest of our employees, self-study at a computer works fine and is preferred, but for the most senior staff, that approach is challenging and perhaps a bit frightening, regardless of the content to be learned. Some have made the transition to computer-based training, but to do so took longer than many employers are willing to tolerate.

Aside from the challenges associated with training in new technologies, changes in education have helped us to see and respond to those people whose learning systems are not compatible with standard training methods.

Giving an owner's manual to an employee with dyslexia will not have a positive outcome unless the employee is willing to put much more effort into the training than other trainees. Often his/her supervisor may not be aware of the difficulty the employee is experiencing and may lose patience with the employee.

The old adage is that when one human system doesn't work, other systems in the body will become more developed than usual. For example, highly acute hearing capability among visibly challenged people is well documented. This ability to strengthen other learning parts of the brain can actually represent an asset for managers who are aware of the different ways to learn.

Which of your staff are visual learners? They are the ones who don't really "get it" by reading or even hearing instructions. They need to see it, to watch it operate, to be able to ask questions about it. Their messages come in best through their eyes.

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How about your auditory learners? You can find them often in front of a computer, wearing a head set and replaying content as often as they need to fully grasp the new message. Their messages come in through their ears.

Another passage way to learning can come from emotional memories or seeing or hearing about emotional experience. These individuals get new information by comparing the emotional content of the new message with personal experiences they can remember. They learn best through recalled or imagined experiences.

One of our clients has an elaborate training center for training customers on the use of their new machinery. Of course, there are detailed training

guides and other instructional literature, but the real training happens when an employee can see how the machine works and get an opportunity to try it on their own with an instructor by their side guiding the employee verbally.

The point is that supervisors today need to be aware of the learning styles of their employees. That information can be gleaned through observation, listening and discussion. Realistically, the supervisor may not be able to accommodate every preference of every employee, but offering as many variable approaches as realistically possible will have a positive payoff. The rate of change is not likely to slow down, so our challenge is to find ways for learning that are both timely and effective.

