CONSULTING, COUNSELING, AND CONSOLING: THE REST OF THE STORY
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ABSTRACT

In the never-ending rush to satisfy the information needs for today's corporations, some type of computing power is being placed on the desks of accountants, engineers, economists, managers, and administrative personnel. Although these employees are experts in their fields, many times they are untrained in the use of the powerful software tools available to them.

Technical personnel used to be insulated behind closed doors, but now they are finding themselves on the firing line - at the front of the classroom. In order to survive, these new teachers must put away their core dumps and language reference manuals and learn to understand what motivates adults to learn. With this understanding, they can be successful in making their classroom experience rewarding for both themselves and the student.

A major challenge facing corporations today is how to successfully train and support employees in the use of powerful software tools. U.S. corporations currently spend more than $200 billion each year in employee education and support. The need to regain the competitive edge in an international economy, rapid changes in technology, a shortage of skilled labor, and continued deficiencies in our educational system, will insure that this trend continues. In the pursuit of corporate objectives, Information Centers are being empowered to provide these training and support activities.

In realizing these objectives, Information Centers have employed a variety of methods. Informal instruction consisting of a cover letter and a manual, formal instruction, whether in a classroom or by computer-based training, and telephone support, have all been used. These methods have met with varying degrees of success. But none of these solutions provide the complete answer. Clearly, solutions lie in a multi-dimensional approach. In order to increase employee effectiveness, trainers and support personnel must develop an expanded toolkit.

Generally, non-professional trainers are chosen from the technical staff. Once safely insulated behind closed doors, they find themselves on the firing line - both on the telephone and at the front of the classroom. The skills that made them successful in previous capacities need to be set aside in favor of ones more suited to new support positions.

According to a special study conducted in 1983 by the American Society for Training and Development, trainers need to be competent in the following areas:

1. Knowledge of how adults acquire and use knowledge and skills. They must have the ability to understand individual differences in learning.

2. Knowledge of the techniques and methods used in training.

3. Ability to influence groups to accomplish tasks.

4. Ability to verbally and visually present information so that the intended purpose is achieved.

5. Ability to gather information from and stimulate insight in individuals and groups.

6. Ability to communicate information, observations and conclusions so that they are understood and can be acted upon (Lippitt 3).

In addition to the skills mentioned above (and possibly more important to the learning process) is the trainer's ability to establish a personal relationship across a broad range of people. Equally important will be the ability to help others recognize and understand their personal needs, values, and goals. The bottom line is that technical knowledge got the trainer his/her new position, but it will not make him/her successful with their new responsibilities.

One common mistake trainers with a technical background make is in the development of classroom instruction. When developing new course material it is common to draw upon previous educational experiences. And where did this knowledge concerning education come from - naturally, from experiences in school as a child, teenager, and college student. So even without knowing it, the trainer, draws upon what is familiar - the traditional learning model. The Pedagogical Model has flourished in our educational system for years.

This model, which is defined as "the art and science of teaching children" (Bolton 403), consists of five basic assumptions:

1. The learner is dependent upon the teacher. The teacher has the full responsibility for making all the decisions about what should be learned, how and when it should be learned, and whether it has been learned. The only role for the learner is that of following the teacher's directions.

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2. Learners enter into the education activity with little or no experience that is of much value as a resource for learning. It is the experience of the teacher that counts. Of necessity, the teacher’s ability to transmit this knowledge through lectures, assigned reading, and audiovisual presentations become as important, if not more so, than the material being presented.

3. Students become ready to learn what they are told that they have to learn in order to advance.

4. Students see learning as a process of acquiring prescribed subject matter content. The course content must be sequenced according to the logic of the subject matter.

5. Students are motivated primarily by external pressures from outside, parents, other teachers, competition for grades, the consequences of failure, and the like (Knowles 8-9).

Compare the above to the five basic assumptions in “the art and science of helping adults learn” (Bolton 403). This model is based on Andragogy, in which the learner is considered the equal of the teacher.

1. The learner is self-directing. Often subconsciously, when put in learning situations where others are imposing their wills, the adult learner will become resentful and resist the learning experience.

2. Adults enter into the education activity with a greater volume and a different quality of experience from the young.

3. Adults become ready to learn when they experience a need to know or do something in order to perform better on the job or improve some other aspect of their lives.

4. Adults enter into the educational experience with a task-centered, or problem-centered orientation to learning. They learn in order to be able to perform a task, solve a problem, or live in a more satisfying way.

5. Although adults do respond to external motivators—a better job, salary increase, more leisure time—the most important motivators are internal: self-esteem, recognition, more self-confidence (Knowles 9-12).

If we accept the research of Malcolm Knowles in developing his Andragogical Model, it becomes clear why so many trainers fail when courses are developed with the Pedagogical Model as a base.

According to Patricia A. McLagan in her book, Helping Others Learn, Designing Programs for Adults, and Jack R. Gibb in his book, Learning Theory in Adult Education, at least four key steps are involved in creating a strong “adult learning” climate. They are as follows:

1. Recognize that participants in your program should take their learning to their “real world,” and that most of the responsibility for making it work in the application environment must be theirs. Chances are that the instructor will not be readily available to help them. The teacher’s obligation is to provide situations in which the learner sees a broader and broader range of problems and from which they learn the ability to seek and formulate their own solutions (Gibb 59).

2. Establish at the start of the program that the responsibility for the success of the class must be shared. The educator must analyze the group needs, find information, organize the information, present the information and facilitate learning. The learner must, in turn, analyze his own needs, customize the general objectives of the class to those needs, be receptive to new behaviors, and most importantly, apply the learning to the work environment (McLagan 13, Gibb 59-60).

3. The trainer must design activities that encourage learners to define their own personal objectives and then help them to plan applications of this knowledge. Most importantly, the trainer must design the class to allow interaction with the learners.

4. Be emphatic. Show that you understand their situation. Respect the learners and their attempts to contribute. You must be able to share yourself. Do not hide behind pseudo-professionalism. Your experiences will help illustrate ideas and establish empathy. Confront and challenge, but only after mutual respect has been established between the student and the teacher.

It is important to remember that no matter how well developed the course material is, students will have barriers to overcome before learning can occur. These barriers can be divided into several categories: Sound, Speed, and Inner Limits.

Nothing is more disheartening for a trainer than spending several days standing before a group of fellow employees, thinking that you are being perfectly understood, only to realize at the end of the course that every face is blank and that the silence you mistook for rapt attention was extreme boredom, or even worse, a sense of complete bewilderment. You have just hit the “sound barrier” of technical jargon. This pitfall can be avoided by including a glossary as one of the class handouts. Begin each class by explaining buzz words that are bound to crop up. Ask students to raise their hand any time you use a technical term you haven’t explained.

Instructors need to be aware that the wide range of experience within the group will mean that it will be very hard to keep the class moving at the same pace. No matter how fast or slow you go, someone will be
unhappy. In order to overcome this, group discussion, simulation exercises, and a problem-solving project should be developed. Another way to safely bypass the "speed trap" is to modularize training. Dividing training classes into small modules with associated labs allows students to schedule their own breaks. Planning a variety of activities during a class allows the trainer to mix delivery methods.

Instructors most always assume that everyone thinks in the same way and that some people are simply better at it than others. Bernice McCarthy in her book, The 4MAT System: Teaching to Learning Styles with Right/Left Mode Techniques, places learners in four different categories. The first type, innovative learners, need the trainer to "give them a reason" that answers the question "why or why not." The analytic learner needs someone to "teach it to them," answering the question "what." The common sense learner needs to have time to try things for themselves so they can answer the question "how does this work." The dynamic learner must teach themselves to discover answers to the questions "what can I make of this" and "what can become of this?" (McCarthy 9)

Some people visualize easily and clearly; others have difficulty generating a clear visual image. Unear, analytic—tasks are to create a supportive environment (both inside and outside the classroom) in which the learner is free to take risks and "to draw out, not pour in." When the teacher functions in this manner, education becomes a cooperative art (Corin 222). Properly done, the experience can be as rewarding for the technical expert as any computer program he has ever written, or any system he has ever designed. And that is what adult education is really all about. Learning from every experience.

### WORK CITED


