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The Key

Oct. 27, 2009

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Letter from the Editor

Is there a better way? Fundamentally, I say "no." Tactically, "absolutely."

For the past 27 years, I've been creating - or responsible for creating - thousand of hours of instructor-led training (ILT), computer-based training (CBT), web-based training (WBT), help systems, self-paced instruction, job aids, and other performance-enhancing tools. Both the breadth of experience and the range of capabilities cause me to humbly present myself as somewhat of an expert on training; approaching 52 allows me to present myself as old enough to speak about training trends.

So, when someone asked me rather frantically at a recent conference, "What do you suggest we do about all these new social learning platforms? How do we formalize learning when it's occurring all around us?"

I understand the woman's panic; we've been increasingly bombarded with e-learning 2.0, podcasts, blogs, wikis, expert management software, instant messaging, mobile computing, and other technological advances to create what many are calling social learning. I define social learning as what happens when a need for knowledge or capability meets technology. Back in "the day," we used to shout out over our cube wall and ask the person to our right or left (depending on who was available or who we thought had the most knowledge) for some help. Today, technology supports "shouting out" to colleagues across the world, groups of like-minded individuals, or even total strangers for guidance - virtually and instantly.



So, my answer to the woman's question was, "Continue embracing and supporting technology as the bridge between experts and those needing the expertise. Connect and be connected!"

"At the same time," I advised, "recognize that technology is the means for connecting. And it's best used to address immediate - and primarily knowledge-based - needs; a person needs an answer to a question now."

However, seeking or obtaining information is - I humbly suggest - NOT training. Training should be about answering questions that aren't asked. Training should be about introducing and honing skills that provide the platform for applying all that knowledge.

It pains me when I see poorly-designed instructor-led training - one that shovels out page after page of intractable information, detail that's out of context, out of date, and useless - or at best, pointless. Why not put all that information on a searchable website, teach participants how to access the information, and cut out the ILT altogether? Or use the classroom time to demonstrate skills and have participants practice those skills - which would include access the information - and receive feedback?



Render unto social learning what is social learning's; render unto ILT that which requires interaction, demonstration, practice, and feedback.



To help you design and develop instructionally sound training - and in recognition of Halloween - we're offering you some Tricks and Treats. On Friday, October 30th (2009) and for one day only, we're making available Entelechy's eGuide on *Practical Design and Development Tips*. Email me at

ttraut@unlockit.com on Friday and I'll reply with your eGuide filled with design and development tricks and treats!

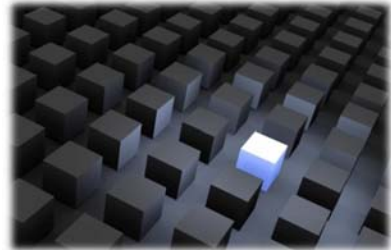
Terence R. Traut
President

Off-the-Shelf vs. Create-from-Scratch vs. Customized

A prospect recently asked if we sell our content off-the-shelf since her company couldn't afford us to create their training from scratch. She had gone to several large well-known content providers (you'd recognize their names) but hadn't found what she was looking for. She sounded like Goldilocks: "This training's too basic for our managers; this one's too advanced; this one uses models that would confuse our folks...."

I asked why she didn't consider customized training where we leverage Entelechy's models and instructional activities to customize - not create from scratch - a program that would be exactly at the right level for her employees. She cited cost as the prohibitive factor. I asked her to consider the following "costs" associated with less-than-effective training:

Cost #1 - Participant time savings
Cost #2 - Training effectiveness
Cost #3 - Training credibility/reputation



Participant Time Savings

When was the last time you went to a training class and said afterwards, "They could have done that in half the time." If you're like most people attending most training, you've more than likely said that after EVERY training class you've attended.

Customizing training allows you to reduce the time that participants are in training and away from their jobs. Training costs less and work doesn't suffer.

The fact is, generic training MUST include a wide range of topics in order to address everyone in the class.

It is estimated that at least 75% of generic training time is wasted because any given piece of the training is relevant to only a small percentage of attendees. If the content is not of particular need to you, you'll simply wait until the next nugget comes along.



My friend just attended a management class on interviewing and hiring. In the class were participants from many industries and types - high tech, retail, blue collar, education, etc. Each participant had unique needs (hiring a retail clerk is NOT the same as hiring a computer sales director!) and BY design, the training tried to hit everyone. Because of this, the company paid not only the \$199 registration fee for my friend to attend, but also spent approximately \$360 on a full day's salary when ¼ of the day (\$270 worth!) was wasted.

Training Effectiveness



Off-the-shelf-training is designed for the masses. Examples that are used in the training must be "translated" in order for participants to understand and apply what they learned. A well-known sales training company (you'd recognize the name) uses an example of selling industrial lighting to illustrate its models and techniques. Now, that's fine if your company happens to sell industrial lighting! If you sell computers or heavy machinery or insurance, the sales concepts must

be translated to your industry at the very least. This is ESPECIALLY true for participants who are less than enthusiastic about being in training since they may be less motivated to figure things out on their own.

Customized training is translated training; concepts and models are relevant to the people you're teaching. Skills and knowledge are IMMEDIATELY applicable.

In addition, by embedding your company's products, your services, your policies, your practices, your resources, your culture, you indirectly reinforce important skills and knowledge. Customized training is doubly effective when compared to generic training.

Training Credibility or Reputation

Training that is less than effective breeds contempt in employees. When participants leave training grumbling that 75% of the time was wasted or that they weren't sure how to apply the concepts to their jobs, those participants are not going to want to waste any more of their valuable time attending training. Disgruntled participants will undoubtedly tell others about the waste of time and encourage others to avoid attending the training. Pretty soon, everyone's avoiding training (and for good reason!).



Training that is targeted, focused, and relevant not only increases performance, but also boosts the reputation that training can have on individual performance and the organization's bottom line. Good training increases the respect for training.

For more information about the value of customized training (versus generic or created-from-scratch training), check out our WBT at http://unlockit.com/Why_Customize/index.htm.

Inventories and Assessments - Unsung Heros

Much emphasis is placed on creating engaging instruction, for good reason: if participants aren't engaged, they're not likely to learn.

As a result, many instructional designers and facilitators place heavy emphasis on "edutainment" creating icebreakers, games, and other ways to generate some energy in an otherwise dull class.



Let me suggest that we often fail to consider some of the most engaging and motivating tools at our disposal - tests, specifically inventories and assessments. While icebreakers may breathe life into a group of people, well-written assessments engage each individual. Furthermore, icebreakers are often tangential to the instruction - an icebreaker is usually an oasis in an otherwise desert of boring training.

On the other hand, assessments are relevant and can be engaging. Moreover, assessments capture individual mind-share - nobody can sleep through an assessment!

That said, it's important to follow some fundamental guidelines when creating effective, engaging assessments:

- Make the questions relevant and important. Don't test on trivial, unimportant stuff. Or at least limit the amount of trivial, unimportant stuff you're testing.

- Use the assessment before training to help focus participants AND to increase participants' desire to learn. If you're providing "refresher" training to senior employees, you know the look: "Why am I here wasting my time?" A well-constructed pre-training assessment can create a "maybe I'm not as smart as I think I am" dissonance in participants, a dissonance that will inspire them to listen more attentively and participate more fully in the class. Call it a "whack up the side of the head," but a well-designed pre-test can open one's mind to learning.

- "Test" on competence AND confidence. One of the most useful elements we've added to pre-training assessments is the confidence index. For each question, we ask participants to answer the question AND to then identify how confident they are in their answer. A person may get 100% correct on a pre-test, but if they're not confident in their responses, training can help. Comparing the confidence index scores before and after training should reveal a dramatic increase in confidence!

#	Question	Pre-training Response	Post-Training Response
1.	Today is December 8, 2003. A client applies for Food Stamps and Health Care today. What period do we use to calculate income? a. Nov 1 - Nov 30, 2003 b. Nov 7 - Dec 7, 2003 c. Nov 8 - Dec 8, 2003 d. Nov 8 - Dec 7, 2003	1. _____ Confidence Index = 100% (fully confident) = 75% (somewhat confident) = 50% (not very confident)	1. _____ Confidence Index = 100% (fully confident) = 75% (somewhat confident) = 50% (not very confident)

- Make testing fun. Jeopardy, Family Feud, poker, Chutes and Ladders, etc. are all formats that lend themselves to assessments. Make it a team competition pitting tables against each other. Extend the competition throughout the day, interspersing questions throughout the day.

For examples of effective - and creative - assessments and inventories, purchase Entelechy's eGuide, *Evaluating Training*, at <http://unlockit.com/eGuide-HPT-ET-EG.htm>. It contains over 20 years of tips and techniques for using assessments and inventories to create engaging effective training. We recently updated the *Evaluating Training* eGuide, so if you already purchased a copy, please email me at ttraut@unlockit.com and I'll send you the updated version free of charge!

And Now, Something Completely Different

Optical Illusion

I love optical illusions, like the parallel lines or the disappearing dots. But how about THIS illusion? <http://www.wimp.com/dragonillusion/>



Audio Illusion

I like optical illusions, but I've NEVER heard an audio illusion. Check it out! <http://www.wimp.com/audioillusion/>



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