

The beautiful thing about learning is that no one can take it away from you.

B.B. King

Whether B.B. King meant that learning is something gained following a specific experience or if he meant learning in a more generic sense, the point remains. Learning is something that happens throughout life. It is important as an educator of adults to recognize that for adults learning is taking place everywhere and all the time.

The challenge to educating adults is to ensure there's an appropriate environment for learning. This environment must be safe and respectful. Of all the variables that may change with each training room, office environment, garage, kitchen, wherever teaching and learning may occur, the one variable that cannot be changed is that of open communication. It is imperative all participants feel their voice is being heard and know that mistakes are just as important as achievement to the success of a learning moment.

Assuming that everyone, participants and trainer alike, agree to foster open communication, it is important for the trainer to leave room in the curriculum for the sharing of real world knowledge. Participants should be allowed to share their experiences because in their rich background exist connections to learning that may not have occurred to the trainer when the lesson was developed. These connections may very well be the key to understanding concepts and formulating the groundwork for transferring learning from the education environment to life--whether life means the office or everyday living.

My belief framework for training adults:

- Adults learn best when they are interested in a subject.
- Adults are internally motivated to learn but often have an external motivator to learning. A trainer should be able to play to both sides of the motivation house. Encourage learners to want to excel in a subject and be realistic why some may need to know the lesson at hand.
- Learning never stops. Teaching and learning happen all the time.
- Good teachers aren't afraid to introduce risk into training: sometimes the answers must be uncovered even if the situation is a little outside the learner's comfort zone.
- I can be both a teacher and a learner. If I'm not learning from the people I'm teaching, I've failed.

This framework guides my teaching objectives. My objectives and methods for reaching those objectives are:

- In order to teach a subject, I need to reach a level of mastery. After reaching this mastery, then I can share the secret with others. I believe it is just as important to talk about the subject in a thorough manner as it is to provide tools for self-discovery/self-learning. It's just as important to know how to find information and/or clarification as it is to know a subject.
- In the process of mastering a subject, knowing the application of the knowledge is just as important. For instance, knowing how to enter critical data into a software application is important, but knowing the reason behind that data entry is just as

- important, if not more so. It is imperative that trainers make the learning real. Adults want to know the “why”.
- Continuous assessment of my craft as a trainer (this term is equal parts facilitator and developer of curriculum) is vital to improvement. Official assessment of training sessions is typically handled by the organization. Informal assessment is a continuous process and includes simple reality checks in the learning environment. Simple reality checks can include:
    - Asking deeper questions to assess how well the trainees are internalizing information. The question needs to elicit an answer that is not a parroting back of what was just discussed.
    - Ask a group of trainees how they are feeling about the class.
    - Locate a friendly face and ask how that person personally feels about how the session is unfolding.
    - When a training session ends, process the effectiveness of the session with colleagues.

Several years ago I heard an anecdote about a trainer who talked about the power he felt while teaching. He said, in so many words, that he felt like a puppet master. This story disturbed me and I strive to be the opposite of a puppet master. The words trainer and trainee are so similar and so are the functions of the people fulfilling those roles. By combining my beliefs and objectives, I hope to foster an enriching learning experience for both the trainee and the trainer.