

How to Retrain for a Second Career

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When factored into learning design, understanding employees' personalities and what motivates them at work can make it easier to retrain an individual.

In today's dynamic business landscape, many have defined their career and success by their job title and skills, only to wake up one morning obsolete. This unsettling sensation may be the case with many high-performing employees due to fear of being laid off in an effort to trim the fat.

Evidence is amassing that such downsizing is counterproductive. Researcher Wayne Cascio of the University of Colorado Denver, for example, won a 2010 Losey Award for his work indicating that unforeseen fallout from downsizing frequently produces negative financial returns. Rather than dismiss valuable staff whose skills might be outdated and scrambling to fill new positions, some companies are retraining those who have already demonstrated their dedication and competence. The question is: can management be confident they'll perform as well in a new role?

If managed correctly, the retraining process offers an opportunity to boost these employees' engagement by placing them where they'll perform with even more energy.

- How people are energized and whether they tend to focus their cognitive energy externally (extroversion) or internally (introversion).
- Preference for taking in information, either through focusing on facts and details (sensing) or big-picture orientation (intuition).
- How decisions are made, based on following objective logic (thinking) or personal values (feeling).
- How one is oriented toward the outside world, either through a planned and organized (judging) or a spontaneous, flexible approach (perceiving).

Psychological type is a personality pattern resulting from the interaction of these four innate preferences. Conscious behavioral choices are influenced by psychological type as well as environmental demands. As people tend to develop behaviors, skills and attitudes associated with their type, the more they use these natural preferences in their work, the more energized, engaged and productive they will be. For example, someone with a preference for extroversion may be energized by the open environment-styled office that has come into vogue. Conversely, someone with a preference for introversion may need privacy to concentrate, and might be drained by an open environment.

If people work in careers that mostly support their natural preferences, it may be quite easy for them to distinguish between innate and learned skills. Those working in a capacity exhibiting their natural talents often describe loving what they do.

For many the influence of family, culture and prior career role has forced them to exhibit behaviors outside their natural preferences — often so much so that they have become proficient in learned behaviors. However, while they may exhibit great skill in use of learned behaviors, they are likely expending much more energy to sustain those behaviors than they would within their natural preferences — work may feel like a stage in which they have to perform learned skills.

ON THE WEB

Adult learners should be handled with thoughtful care and attention to the quirks the big kids may bring to the classroom. To see what you can do, visit CLOmedia.com/articles/view/4143.

Who You Are, What You Do

The fact that an employee excelled in a previous function doesn't necessarily mean the job was optimally suited to his or her natural style; many learn to perform well in roles that are less than ideal. For such individuals, retraining based entirely on previous experience may sell both the employee and the organization short.

The first step in retraining for a new role involves helping employees distinguish learned behaviors from natural preferences — innate mental processes that drive how people perceive information and make decisions. Psychologist Carl Jung's theory of personality type, as presented by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) instrument, identifies four such preferences:



Consequently, identifying which characteristics are learned versus innate often yields a sense of relief, clarity and an empowering understanding of “This is who I am, that is what I do.” When moving into a new role, it also helps employees pinpoint when they’ll need to flex behavior from natural to learned — knowledge that increases their level of control over the transition process.

During retraining, this becomes important as employees will inevitably have to learn skills that fall out-

side their comfort zone, even when training for jobs that align well with their innate preferences. Knowing in advance which aspects of the new job are likely to be challenging will help the trainer design curriculum and select learning methods.

For example, a trainer designing curriculum for people with a preference for intuition, who will tend to focus more on the big picture and less on details, may encounter some difficulty helping them master a new

process involving specific sequential steps. Start with an explanation of why the steps should be performed in a particular order. Satisfying the intuition-based need to understand the big picture will give them room to flex their work style to master processes that come more naturally.

Pinpointing the Best Role

As innate characteristics are identified, insight into talents and interests will emerge that will help identify a new role linked to an employee's innate strengths. Consider how the following occupational themes from the Strong Interest Inventory — an assessment that compares people's interests to those like them who have found satisfying careers — best describe employees' interests, work activities, potential skills and personal values:

Social: An interest in working with people, teamwork and helping others — a cooperative and collaborative work environment is appealing.

Artistic: Interested in roles that offer the opportunity to be creative, imaginative and independent.

Enterprising: Interest in business, politics, leadership, entrepreneurship, selling, managing or persuading — appreciate the environment that offers competition and the chance to motivate or direct others.

Realistic: Tend to be hands-on and physical — enjoy working with machines, computers, networks, operating equipment, and value tradition and practicality.

Conventional: Organized and detail-oriented — interests tend to favor setting up procedures, systems and organizing, and an environment that allows them to work with numbers and data analysis.

Investigative: Analytical, independent and curious; enjoy solving abstract problems or research — prefer environments that are scientific and research-oriented.

Combinations of these six broad interest patterns may describe employees' work personality and provide a sense of what keeps them engaged and motivated. Again, it's important to differentiate between learned and innate preferences. It's not uncommon for someone whose innate preferences favor a more enterprising role, for example, to have developed through necessity skill in an investigative capacity. Therefore, placing them in a role similar to their previous one may not yield the best performance.

Developing a sense for their innate preferences, on the other hand, helps to identify a new role based on actual day-to-day activities. This may seem like an obvious strategy, but people frequently choose careers based on other factors, and often their perception of what a job entails is different from reality. Pinpointing

READER REACTION

We asked our LinkedIn followers: What should talent leaders be doing to retain and develop high-potential talent whose skills might be outdated? Here are some responses.



David Forry: High potentials go through cycles, life changes and may not even want to be a 'high potential' anymore. It could be something like getting involved in activities outside of work, taking a back seat to a partner's career or at work they may take a stretch assignment that they may not truly fill for a couple years. It sounds kind of funny (and sad) but they are only high potential if their potential is greater than their current peers. With that said, if you have high potentials you should work to cultivate the talent and keep them in-house.



Craig Mitchell: Talent leaders should start thinking more holistically in their approach. The traditional model — managing high talent focused on meeting their needs and cultivating them like a plant for a future company flower show — is outdated. There needs to be more of a recognition that talent is a fairground ride and what goes around comes around.

Talent leaders should be focused on developing the talent they have, but they should not be blinkered to trying to keep them in-house at all costs. Organizations need to recognize that talent who they have developed who then chooses to move on still assists in developing the sector and promotes a positive image of your company. As more companies come around to this way of thinking, a talent carousel starts to develop in the sector, and what you lose with one hand when an experienced talented hire leaves you gain with the other when a talented, experienced hire joins.

Incestuous talent management processes have to end. Just like a gene pool, a company becomes more effective and agile by varying that pool and not becoming fixated on what it already has.



Rupalli Thacker: I believe this to be a culture question as much as a pure talent question. Top consulting firms continue to propound "move up or move out" culture, and that, for anyone who cares to continue contributing, is a sign to continue staying relevant. Even outside of the top consulting firms, talent is the sought-after competitive advantage, and therefore, if one does not want to lose high potentials, then yes, invest in their retraining.



Michelle O'Connor: In the pharma and biotech industry, we have a lot of high-potential talent, and traditionally, our career ladders have provided enough opportunities for people to develop new skills by moving up or across the organization.

With those opportunities shrinking, we need to do some retraining. In the field, our customers (doctors, hospitals, payers, etc.) are demanding that we deliver salespeople who have more business acumen, and most companies are supplementing their new hire training with ongoing coursework that helps their sales team develop deeper financial knowledge and a better understanding of how health care providers make decisions (cost effectiveness data, clinical pathways, etc.).

Considering the large investment we have in our employees, it only makes sense to adapt our training as business needs shift, rather than starting from scratch.



Susan Bender Phelps: I think this is a very important question for all businesses to explore. There are high potentials who are diamonds in the rough. There are high performers who go through cycles. There are also high performers who have been so successful doing what they do in a particular way that training them to do something new will be resisted because they were so successful for so long.

In my work, I have found that involving high performers in mentoring high potentials is a great way to maximize the results of training and retraining. Generally, the high potentials are more interested in learning new ways to succeed, because they have not peaked. They are hungry and they have the advantage of being abreast of the latest in technology and other advances. What they do not have is the foundation that the high performers developed when career ladders had more steps.

By pairing them, the high performers' passion can be reignited. They can be introduced to the new ideas and new ways of doing things of their mentees. The mentees can share and teach while absorbing the skills and thinking that the career ladder used to provide from their mentors. The relationships become mutually beneficial and energize both parties.

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a role that aligns well with the employee's interests and preferences will shape the training process by illuminating their preferred learning style.

Support Individual Learning Styles

Perceiving — the cognitive process governing how we take in new information — is a critical component of optimal learning, which will take place when retraining aligns with the employee's learning style. In designing training, consider that according to researchers Nancy Schaubhut and Richard C. Thompson's 2009 book *MBTI Type Tables International*, approximately 73 percent of the population has a preference for sensing, or learning by focusing on facts and details, and may become frustrated with theoretical material unless they see its practical applications.

On the other hand, 27 percent of the population has a preference for intuition, or learning by focusing on patterns and possibilities. They may become highly agitated when required to follow a step-by-step approach, unless they first see the big picture and grasp the underlying concepts.

According to *MBTI Type Tables International*, those who gravitate toward training and HR tend to have a preference for intuition. There's a good chance that optimal learning for those administering training is different than for those receiving training. In designing a program, trainers should take care to accommodate all learning styles and not let their own preferences bias their approach. This means ensuring that details and concrete applications aren't lost in a theoretical and conceptual cloud.

Whether intentional or imposed, people tend to manage change better on all levels if they feel in control of their own needs during the process. Allowing them to receive information and communicate concerns according to their preferences will give them a sense of control at a time when people often feel helpless.

For example, those with a preference for judging may prefer a set plan with strategies and clear parameters. However, these same parameters may spark resistance among people with a preference for perceiving, who often prefer more open and loosely defined processes.

Further, as those with a preference for thinking may need to know the logic behind the decisions, it will be helpful to explain in detail the pros and cons of various options. When retraining someone with a preference for feeling, who may be more concerned with the effect of change on the individuals going through the process, a more empathetic approach may be helpful.

Managing Stress Through Transition

Stress will be present to some degree during retrain-

ing. It affects both learning and change management. But according to Naomi L. Quenk, author of *In the Grip*, stress-induced behaviors are often out of character, such as withdrawal for those who normally are engaged with others, and emotional outbursts for those who typically have a calm demeanor. Rather than applying a bandage to stress-induced behavior, explore the root causes of these emotions.

During change, for example, employees with a preference for extroversion may become depressed and not share their feelings with colleagues. This kind of internalizing is likely out of character, but this stress symptom may be overlooked during retraining and become a roadblock to success in their new role. To help them get back on track, consider that for such people, common stressors may include changing procedures, poorly defined criteria, a disorganized environment, and lack of control over time and tasks.

Conversely, an employee with a preference for introversion may become excessively harsh or critical, exhibiting behaviors that are out of character and perhaps puzzling to those who know him or her. To help this employee get back to a state conducive to learning, consider that root stress causes may include rigid structures, time pressures and insufficient time to work alone. In general, anticipate some negative side effects during the retraining process. It doesn't reflect poorly on the employee, it just means he or she is experiencing normal transition-induced stress.

For tried and true employees, the retraining process could place them in a position to add even more value to the organization. The journey to a new career, however, may offer a few roadblocks, which can be overcome by helping them understand what makes them tick. According to personality type theory, differences in behavior result from people's inborn tendencies to use their minds in different ways. Understanding their natural strengths and gifts provides clarity about why certain roles may be more energizing and comfortable.

The retraining process will yield better results as the trainer follows an approach that includes identifying the employees' natural preferences for perceiving information; determining their work personality or what aspects of a job will keep them motivated at work; tailoring the training program to their particular learning style; and understanding all of the aforementioned to minimize stress. This process will help guide employees to hone skills that fully leverage their innate talents, and step into a role where they'll perform better and enjoy it more. **CLO**

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