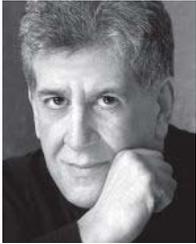


Innovation Requires Stopping

Putting an end to programs could start a new wave of business success BY ELLIOTT MASIE



Elliott Masie is the chairman and CLO of The Masie Center's Learning Consortium. He can be reached at editor@CLOmedia.com.

Does your organization have the courage to stop a learning practice for the sake of generating innovation? For example, as you add video segments or social learning, might you stop using handouts in class, traditional level one evaluations or even new-hire orientation classes?

Every year there are new and exciting innovations described in industry publications and in dialogues among learning colleagues throughout many organizations. We discuss increasing our ability to add more applications, collaborative techniques or other new approaches to create, deliver or track learning, but when do we stop some of our current methods to make room for innovation?

Learning executives have become quite nimble at the additive process. With software as a service and partnerships with learning suppliers, it is fairly easy to add new elements or tactics to learning programs. Our nimbleness at deleting learning elements seems poor in comparison.

Stopping breaks the ritual nature of learning programs.

Let me make the case for regular and persistent stopping of our learning methods:

- Stopping energizes learners and learning professionals. When we stop or even pause a method, the learning offering feels fresh. Example: Stop one of your learning rituals, like having attendees introduce themselves at the start of a session, and both learners and leaders will perk up to see how the event shapes up differently. That perking up will lead to more learning attention.
- Stopping creates time and resources in the learning plan and budget. Example: Stop inviting a high-priced expert to the leadership program, and suddenly you have more time to spend on different resources or people. Imagine inviting 10 experts in for 15-minute video interviews instead.
- Stopping and redesigning can refresh a program when and if it is reintroduced. Example: An organization decided to stop teaching a time management program for nine months. During that time, leaders did a totally fresh design of the program.

When it was reintroduced with new content, processes and title, it was welcomed back.

- Stopping signifies the learning function's commitment to iterative innovation. New ventures are embracing the concept of multiple, sequential innovations with the courage to fail and stop editions along the way. Example: Over a two-year period, start a program, and after each offering, ask participants to vote on a module-by-module basis if activities should be kept, reduced, changed or eliminated.
- Stopping breaks the ritual nature of learning programs. Some programs are core to the workers' tribal experience in the organization. But many are offered because "we always offer them." When an organization has the courage to stop a program, that ritual is replaced with a more strategic design decision. Example: Replace the promotion-based residential program with an alternative approach using stretch assignments and coaching. Some rituals are important, but the learner is often more interested in impact and results.

I am not advocating random stopping. The goal is not to simply disrupt the learning schedule or methods. Stopping isn't always easy. Here are some of the pushbacks you will hear as you try to stop a learning approach:

- "It is too expensive to pick or design a new program. Let's save money by using what we have."
- "Even though the program is weak, we all went to it and survived. It is our common boot camp experience. If I did it, they can do it."
- "Stopping will confuse learners and their managers. They will not know what we are offering."
- "Learners are creatures of habit. They want to have predictable activities every time they go to a class. Why mix it up?"
- "Stopping might be a good idea, but senior management is not impressed by deletion. Let's focus on what we can add that will make a splash!"

Learners are changing how they consume content, both at home and at work. They are thirsty for more effective, efficient and engaging ways to master their jobs. They and organizations cannot innovate if we just keep adding. Let's have the courage to include stopping as part of our innovation and design processes. [CLO](#)