

It All Starts With Learners

How are you motivating employees to care about and consume learning? • BY BOB MOSHER



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Many would argue that Peter Senge's 1990 book "The Fifth Discipline," which popularized the concept of the learning organization, was one of the defining books in our industry.

He elevated the conversation around how an organization is a living organism that's constantly trying to keep up with a continuously changing environment. He was way ahead of his time because if times were hectic in 1990, then they are beyond chaotic now.

Change has become the new normal. Every learner within an organization needs to learn at or above the speed of change, otherwise the enterprise runs the risk of being eclipsed by its competitors, technical advancement, geopolitical swings and economic ebb and flow. Simply hoping the traditional learning organization is enough to sustain this change is obsolete in today's world. To survive, and thrive, we need learners to own their own engagement, not an organization that drives it.

If learners don't own their own engagement, the learning organization will never realize its goals.

Timothy Clark challenges the fundamental principle of ownership when it comes to engagement in his 2012 book "The Employee Engagement Mindset." Many leaders believe the learning vision and direction start at the organizational level. This is then supported and interpreted by the managers and passed down to the learner to act upon.

Clark wrote that this is the fundamental problem with most attempts to foster and grow a learning organization. Sure, the environment needs to be conducive and supportive, but unless learners own their own engagement, the learning organization is never truly realized.

Clark discovered that roughly 75 percent of today's employees are not fully engaged with their work. This is a frightening statistic, especially for learning leaders. Much of their success depends on learners caring about and actively participating in the design of their

own learning and professional development.

Whether it's learning programs in the classroom or e-learning, many ask me: "How do I motivate my learner to care and consume?" Clark would argue that you don't. Our job is not to motivate but to facilitate and enable six key drivers in the most highly engaged individuals. Learners own their own engagement. The sooner they — and we — realize this, the sooner true engagement will create a sustainable learning organization.

According to Clark, the six drivers are:

- 1. Connect — Plug into their power:** The degree to which learners feel a connection to their workplace and colleagues.
- 2. Shape — Make it their own:** The process learners use to customize their professional experience while pursuing the organization's goals and acknowledging real constraints.
- 3. Learn — Move at the speed of change:** The overwhelming informal, and infrequently formal, process for acquiring knowledge, skills and experience.
- 4. Stretch — Go to their outer limits:** The process of getting out of their comfort zone, and pushing into their outer limits.
- 5. Achieve — Jump into the cycle:** The process of focusing and sustaining their efforts to accomplish something meaningful.
- 6. Contribute — Get beyond themselves:** This is effort directed beyond individual concerns toward a meaningful purpose.

The learning organization must recognize each of these drivers, understand the engagement hooks for each, and create an environment where the learner can flourish.

True learning doesn't happen in our classrooms, our learning management system, our virtual events, or even our mentoring/coaching programs — it happens in the workflow. Learning happens when an engaged learner is enabled in the informal domain and sustained by the other five drivers.

The more we can help learners understand these drivers and enable them to own each one, the more intrinsically engaged our learners will allow themselves to be. This helps encourage, maintain and sustain the performance levels leaders want, and that learning and development is held accountable for supporting every day. This is actualizing true ROI: return on instruction. **CLO**