



Things Every Worker Needs in Order to Learn and Develop

COLLECT ALL THREE AND WIN!

BY JEFF GRAY AND BEN ORTLIP

One of the most common causes of L&D strategy failure has less to do with LMS selection, content quality, learning paths or goal clarity and more to do with the environment in which it is executed. Plants need food, water and sunshine to grow. Employees need certain things to grow, too.

Maslow was right about one thing. People don't give a rip about things like self-actualization if they feel like they are barely surviving. Also, if workers aren't getting what they need professionally, they will not be positioned for effective learning either. Companies often call us to discuss something tactical like knowledge management or gamification. However, once we start poking around under the surface, we sometimes discover there are deeper issues to solve first. Tactical solutions have never been very effective at addressing strategic problems. And somehow it seems like in L&D it's especially tempting to use doodads to solve deep-seated dilemmas.

Before an organization can learn and develop, the people inside it must be engaged. If you want learning to be effective, then you must understand what engages people to want to learn in the first place. Engagement — the drive and desire to learn — is linked to three unique elements. The organization must be able to assess how much of each of these elements their people are getting. The really smart groups also find ways to store up massive amounts of these three elements in their engagement fuel tank.

Here are the three drivers behind why a person finds work engaging. In the spirit of effective learning, they all start with C.

1

CRAFT

Inside virtually everyone is a maestro searching for a masterpiece. For some, it's the primary source of fulfillment. Think artists, athletes and performers whose core passion is a unique skill, talent or giftedness. But those are just the obvious examples. You'll also find this source of engagement providing satisfaction to woodworkers, orthopedic surgeons, venture capitalists, inventors, chefs and builders. Anywhere skill is required, you will find some workers who derive joy from performing it, right down to the master street sweeper. Tasks that are meaningless and monotonous to one person can be a veritable playground for another.

So why are some people more engaged by craft than others? There are numerous factors, of course, but any organization can optimize the craft factor to raise engagement.

First, emphasize it. When Starbucks closed all 7,100 of its stores for three hours to re-teach 135,000 baristas the art of making espresso, it turned what had become a routine into an art form. For many baristas, job satisfaction was no longer just about the benefits after that. The challenge of exercising those skills was nothing short of engaging, and along with each successful cup of espresso came a renewed sense of satisfaction.

Second, measure it. A problem clearly defined is a problem half-solved. Likewise, a craft clearly described is engagement half-unleashed. Games without rules and goals quickly lose their appeal. It is in the nuances of the execution that they become compelling: mastering a curve ball, nailing a jump shot, or completing a pass. People become captivated when they know how to impact the score. Organizations that leverage craft well also measure craft well. They define it, teach it, practice it, and live it.

Finally, celebrate it. People are drawn to competition, even if it is against an inanimate goal. We are creatures of recognition. When craft is recognized as an organizational value, and even embedded in performance management, people engage accordingly.

2

CAUSE

Peter Drucker told the story of three stone-cutters who were asked what they were doing. The first replied that he was making a living. The second explained that he was cutting stones exceptionally. And the third proclaimed, "I am building a cathedral." Transcendence is an engaging concept. Some work is innately transcendent: social work, public service or catastrophe relief. However, even for-profit companies can find the deeper meaning in the things they do. One of our fast-food clients wraps their operational routines around a servant leadership objective. They take pride in providing a sense of community, connection and belonging for each guest who visits. Servant leadership is a true point of focus for team members, which, in turn, feeds their quest for transcendence to execute it well.

3

CULTURE

People are social creatures. The need for belonging is one of the strongest drivers in the human experience. It just so happens that organizations of people provide an ideal venue for social expression. Culture is nothing less than the collective personality of the organization. Just as friends are a source of engagement, companies with great personalities can be engaging too. Thoughtful leaders can architect the culture of the organization in the same way that thoughtful people can refine their own personality by shedding bad habits and adopting good ones. When a worker belongs to an organization that heightens esteem, shares personal values, and/or creates a sense of support and community, that worker is energized to become more engaged.

Craft, Cause, and Culture are the food, water and sunshine of any organization. Most of the time, people will tolerate shortcomings in two of these three categories as long as they are well-served by at least one. Starving artists are willing to starve as long as they can practice their craft. Martyrs are willing to die when the cause is significant. People will sometimes compromise craft and cause when simply belonging delivers enough value. Needless to say, the best organizations constantly cultivate all three. And that lays a foundation of workplace engagement capable of supporting the most ambitious L&D strategies.

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