

PHD EDUCATION AND TRAINING | EDUCATIONAL TIPS & TRICKS

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ADULT LEARNING PRINCIPLES

Have you taken a course or participated in a training session that left you disappointed? Was it difficult to focus? Did you tune the instructor out? Your intent was to learn whatever was being presented, but you left with a negative attitude, feeling that the training session was a waste of your time.

Well, let's take a look at what turns adult learners on or off, and what helps or disrupts their willingness to learn. Check out these four meaningful principles for adult learning in the work setting:

-Readiness -Experience -Autonomy -Action



Readiness: Always focus training on your learners' needs. Make your training session respond to the learner's question: "What's in it for me?" When you can structure your training, whether live, online, or at a distance, so that meaningful benefits are reinforced constantly, both explicitly and implicitly, your learners will open themselves to what you are sharing with them. The following sample situation illustrates that fact.



Experience: Adult learners come to each learning event with their unique prior knowledge. This is what we may term as their *experience*. Adult learners possess a great deal more experience than do children. Some of it facilitates learning, but it also may act as an inhibitor. Adult learners learn if the training is taught at their level and type of experience. If the training goes over their heads or is outside of their experience base, then you lose them. Once lost, they are difficult to reign them back in again.



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Our job as trainers, instructors, and educators is to assist adult learners to learn. Their success is our success. By implementing the four key adult learning principles: readiness, experience, autonomy, and action, you open your learners' minds, assist in connecting with what they already know (prior knowledge), you get them involved, and lead them to being successful on the job. Remember, the golden rule of training is, "Train others as you would have them train you."



- ▶ **Autonomy:** Adult learners want to make their own decisions. Decision making is a major characteristic of adulthood. There are two values in this for learning. The first value is that decision making requires gathering information, analyzing that information, generating alternative decisions, weighing the consequences of each alternative, and, finally, sorting through and selecting what appears to be the optimal decision. All this mental engagement strongly contributes to learning and retention and to increasing the future application to the job of what has been decided. The second value to decision making is that the more the learner participates in the decision, the higher the probability that the participant will consider the decision credible and therefore will commit to it. This contribution has a powerful impact on comprehension, retention, and application post training.



- ▶ **Action:** Adult learners in the work place participate in training to learn how to improve or alter their performance on the job. To ensure buy in from the learners, their attention need to be focused on the immediate application of what they are supposed to learn. If they are unable to see how they can put it into action as soon as they return to the job, their interest and learning decreases. If they don't receive any form of post training support to assist in sustain application of what they are learning, they may find the training entertaining and enlightening, but they won't apply it back on the job

We hope you have enjoyed some of the things we have learned! We will continue to explore and research successful tools for training, educating and learning.

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