

Small Dose Learning: On-the-Job and in Real-Time

The basic tenets of small dose learning are summarized from a research paper provided by Joe Cox at Diaplan, Inc. who in association with Leadership University, provides an online self-directed coaching system covering 35 different modules from stress management to negotiation skills. In partnership with Leadership University, Diaplan makes small dose learning actionable. For more info: <http://www.leadu.com/perflead>.

The seeds of thinking for small dose learning germinated sixteen years ago with an attempt to validate instructor-led programs in terms of measurable behavioral changes. These validation studies were fruitless in establishing clear linkages between training and performance.

The exercises were, however, fruitful in forcing a look at how people actually learn, i.e. change their behavior. It is necessary to compare company training programs with the proven findings from numerous studies on how people learn. Various authorities like Rogers, Skinner, Miller, Simon and Warfield have formed similar conclusions on adult learning:

- Learning occurs in small doses.
- Assimilation requires time and practice.
- Learning must be reinforced and built upon.
- Learning must be measurable both quantitatively and qualitatively over time.
- Learning is an individual matter and learners must assume responsibility for their own learning.

What's Wrong with Most Training Programs

Most training programs do not meet the foregoing criteria. They teach in large doses, pay no attention to assimilation with the job, give scant regard to existing knowledge or skills (this approach is topical, not building-block). They have little by way of measurement and bridging technology to assist learners in assuming responsibility for their application of learning.



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Three Common Barriers to Training Application

1. There is little application with outmoded learning methods. That's when courses are delivered in large doses off the job, by someone other than trainees' bosses, in broad-brush format. Ebbinghaus' "Curve of Forgetting" shows that retention is a mere 10 percent in 30 days (for application it is even less).

2. There is little application without commitment. Usually the system kills the commitment. The likelihood is slim that the boss will give the hourly, daily feedback and reinforcement the learner needs. The learner is left to resolve the ambiguity on how to distill the classroom super dose to finite, impromptu tasks and scheduled events. The learner has 25-60 years of instinctive programming that collides with prescriptions from training. Commitment really boils down to the memory and internal motivation of the learner. Pinning transference hopes on that is, at worst, being careless with corporate training dollars; at best it is better than nothing.

3. There is little application without "Time-Activation." That's a new term. It means that commitment is only real when specific times are set to apply the training to priorities and scheduled events. Without time-activation, practice is capricious if at all. When caprice is the default mode, measurement is impossible. Any program that fails to orchestrate time activation operates in default mode.

Coaching is about results!

Learners come into training programs bypassing input from their managers on the way to the course and on the way back to the job. In most cases, training departments don't even give bosses coaching tools. The bosses aren't doing any of the training on the job, where it counts.

The training department can change that by involving managers in teaching and on-the-job mentoring. They can begin by breaking courses down into small doses. They can stop using concepts that they don't tie to actual job activities. They can start to define learning as "the successful job application of processes and behaviors". They can begin using pre-tests to determine existing knowledge and skill, and post-tests over time to validate understanding and application.

Organizations that implement a small dose learning program realize interesting results within only a few months. Bosses learn that coaching pays off. Learners take more responsibility for their learning because they are aware that they are being measured against standards. These standards begin to work their way into performance appraisals.

In order for these changes to be effective, training staff must start to care more about learning than teaching. Directors must stop evaluating trainers on participant course evaluations and begin evaluating them against their role as learning consultants: measurements must validate results on the job.

In one organization that instituted a small dose learning program using adult learning principles, staff turnover dropped from 44 percent to 26 percent over a two year period. Managers saw their roles changing from administrator to coach. Interviews revealed improved impressions of bosses. Sales increased; customer complaints went down.

How Small Dose Learning Programs Work

The learner applies a minute dose; it works, he/she tries it again. Reinforcement: if your pen stops writing but writes again if you bear down harder, will you go back to the "natural" method? No, you just got reinforced in a small dose of learning and the boss was nowhere around. You are ready for dose two. No commitment problem.

For learning programs to be effective they must provide a range of bridging tools from worksheets to planners to flash cards so the skill from each training dose will get linked to a specific appointment or priority at a specific time.

Instincts (appropriate and inappropriate) are our constant companions. To supplant inappropriate instincts with appropriate skills, it is mandatory that the training be “as accessible” as the instincts – at the point of reaction. Not in a manual on the shelf – not in a fading memory – but in your hand, in the right dose, with obvious application.

Without follow-up and practical application, participants recall only 10 percent of what they learned one month after training. And they may not apply even that much on the job.

Small dose learning provides the means for getting the most from your training investment through ongoing, incremental on-the-job application and reinforcement of skills and knowledge.

Flatter corporate structures, dynamic markets, changing technology, faster turnaround times, and more demanding customer requirements make continuous, life-long learning an imperative for individuals and organizations. These same factors make it ever more difficult for learners and their supervisors to find the time to practice the skills and knowledge they have learned.

Learners want learning that’s available when they need it, not when the training department can schedule it. And, in the real world of their jobs, they need the learning in a readily accessible format that they can fit into their busy schedules. They need reinforcement, application and practice where and when it’s most productive, useful and motivating: on-the-job, and just-in-time.

Research and experience indicate that people learn better, retain more, and are positively motivated through learning by doing, especially when supported through regular and frequent business coaching. When they see just how the learning applies to their jobs, they are more likely to adopt and use the skills and concepts.

Whether it’s bowling or baseball, tennis or training, following-through makes all the difference in the results you get. Bottom line results come about when skills and knowledge are applied on the job. That requires on-going follow-through and reinforcement.

Unfortunately, in the real world, things tend to slip between the cracks. Everyone – facilitators, managers, supervisors, and trainees – leaves the workshop with the best intentions. Too soon, though, reality intrudes. Priorities change. Emergencies arise. Fires have to be put out. And the intentions to practice, follow-up, reinforce, and coach fall by the wayside.

The transition to self-directed learning is gaining momentum. The 50th Anniversary issue of the *Journal of the American Society of Training and Development* places “on-demand, just-in-time” learning as one of the significant trends in effect and forecasted to accelerate.

The use of technology and information highways to enable distance learning is escalating exponentially. However, many organizations will continue to employ traditional instructor-led approaches for years to come.

A Learning Curriculum

Here is an example of Diaplan’s curriculum of 35 self-study intranet or classroom modules incorporating the following adult-learning components:

1. The 35 modules are comprised of 500 small dose units of one page or one PC screen.
 2. Each unit is linked to a job activity found among common daily management tasks.
 3. Each module is preceded by a pre-test to gauge current understanding and skills.
 4. Units are written in a user-friendly mentoring, conversational approach.
 5. Graphics and bolded statements/questions bring strong visual elements to the training.
 6. Built-in diagnostics, blanks to be filled in, checklists and suggestions for application make each unit highly interactive.
 7. Assimilation is slow, orderly, and at the learner’s pace.
 8. Each module is accompanied by worksheets for planning application.
 9. One to 31 daily planning pages are available which will insert into any day planner/organizer, allowing for planned linkage to scheduled events and daily priorities.
 10. Flash cards with structured management processes and related behavioral skills attach to a pagefinder in any common day-planner for review during execution of priorities and scheduled interactions.
 11. The module’s content is built upon 150 Core Competencies measured across 10 categories of management functions.
 12. Post-Learning Inventories accompany each module. Mentor Guides are used by mentors to coach their learners in applying concepts to the job.
 13. The Pre-tests and Post-tests provide validation of cognitive learning and successful behavioral change (job application).
 14. All learning is on-demand, just in time, at the desk, eliminating under kill, overkill and vague relevancy.
 15. Ten of the 35 modules are targeted to develop the coaching skills of the learner’s supervisor to ensure quality interactions concerning the learner’s development.
 16. **All of the above modules are supported, reinforced and guided by effective small-dose business coaching.**
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As trainers and participants become comfortable with self-development, the classroom paradigm will gradually give way to self-development. In time the classroom experience will be limited to activities that call for group involvement, such as group problem-solving, role-playing and team development.

Perfecting this process will never end. Research continues. What do you want to measure? The Kirkpatrick levels for measuring learning is a fine attempt at bolstering programs without effective job-bridging built in. When small dose learning is used, the crux is utility. It leads to all levels of measurement.



A Final Word...

Over the past 6 years, I worked side by side with outstanding clients and coaches. The key issue in each of those successes is the ability to create actionable training and coaching. Regardless of the field, industry or position, small dose learning and coaching is the most efficient and effective way to produce results in the now, near and far term.

If you're ready to supercharge your own learning and development with small dose learning, I invite you to visit our training solutions for any size company. Whether you have 1 or a 1000, Leadership University can provide you with a customized, efficient, and cost-effective solution to improve productivity in your business or organization. We have staff standing by to take your call for a free consultation about how to get the most benefits and results from utilizing this incredibly effective system. — Mike Jay

A methodology for...
Awareness, Purpose, Competence & Well-Being.

There isn't any person, profession, business or network that won't benefit from enhancements in any of these areas.

Values that make a difference...
RightACTION, Results, Resilience, and Generati.

The Right People
Doing the Right Things
In the Right Way
@ the Right Time
4 the Right Reasons!
To Get the Right Results
under uncertain conditions
in response to discontinuity
to produce the third win
for all the players!

An integral leadership system...
creating being, having, doing and becoming capable.
Identifying, exploring, developing, previewing outcomes that matter.

Healthy Bottom Lines...
internally, externally, financially and developmentally leveraging.
When the smoke clears and the stories are told, are you and your business taking action that makes a difference.

If this is music to your ears...
then take a deeper look into yourself and your business through a professional coaching system with everything you need
in one place.

Enter the NEXT Society here
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