CHAPTER 1

TELL ME HOW: IMPROVING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

1. Accelerated Learning by Lou Russell
2. Action Learning
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“There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance.”
—Socrates
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<th>Individual</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Cheap</th>
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**Special Note:** To make this classification more accurate, we have added the interventions “classroom training” and “e-learning,” since these specific types of interventions have varying characteristics from each other. There are no sections on classroom training and e-learning since many of the interventions listed are just more specific descriptions of classroom training and e-learning.
WHAT IS ACCELERATED LEARNING?

In 1910 Brigadier General Billy Mitchell said that using airplanes to sink battleships was “damn nonsensical.” In fact, he offered to stand on the bridge of any battleship and let anyone try. Any person who does not continue to learn is at risk of missing the wave of the future, as Mitchell did.

By simply realizing the underlying value of accelerated learning (AL)—that people intake differently, process differently, and need different environments to maximize their learning—individuals can make a dramatic improvement in their own abilities to learn more thoroughly and quickly. Additionally, training organizations and project leaders can improve and accelerate information transfer using these ideas. Attention to learning techniques can also turn meeting drudgery into fun—and speed learning in the process.

Different practitioners define AL differently. My definition is as follows:

*Accelerated learning is rapidly developed content that is of benefit to the business and results in long-term retention by the learner. This is accomplished by honoring the different learning preferences of each individual learner.*

What is contained in this definition:

- emphasis on a business (or personal) goal, not on learning for the sake of learning, which is valuable, but is not something that needs to be done quickly
- emphasis on speed with retention, not to the detriment of retention, and therefore applicability to the business problem
- emphasis on the diversity of each person’s learning style and an ever-present focus on the learner.

What is not contained in this definition:

- a set of rigorous standards or methods to achieve the results
- a practice (this is more a philosophy)
- a set of techniques or mediums (AL can be used in all forms of learning using many traditional and nontraditional techniques).

AL challenges everyone involved to address the question, How can we learn better?

AL is based on honoring certain things currently known about how people learn. These include:

- intake styles
- multiple intelligences
- whole brain
- the triune brain.
It also leverages many things being discovered about memory and retention, which is beyond the scope of this chapter but is covered in my book, *The Accelerated Learning Fieldbook* (Russell, 1999).

**Intake Styles**

In the field of neurolinguistic programming (NLP), studies on how individuals prefer to get new information have been conducted for years. They have found that preferences fall into three categories:

- **visual**, intake by seeing
- **auditory**, intake by hearing
- **kinesthetic**, intake by doing, touching.

People vary in their orientation toward these three styles. Some people learn primarily through one style, others mix and match styles. Intake styles are not the same as intelligence: Whether you prefer to learn by seeing, hearing, or doing has no bearing on how intelligent you are. It is just your preference for receiving new learning.

It is easy to identify your own preferences and guess someone else’s from certain physical characteristics that track with these preferences. Visual learners prefer books or videos, tend to speak quickly and somewhat high pitched, look up when they are thinking, and say things like “I see what you mean.” Sixty percent to 72 percent of the population prefers to learn this way, as figure 1-1 shows. Auditory learners prefer speeches, discussions, or tapes. They speak slowly and quietly, look straight ahead when they are thinking, and use phrases like “I can hear what you are saying.” They make up 12 percent to 18 percent of the population. Kinesthetic learners prefer to move when they are learning. They speak quickly and with great changes in intonation and body language, look down when thinking, and use phrases like “I get it.” Although 18 percent to 30 percent of the general population prefers to learn kinesthetically, I have found that there is a higher percentage of people who prefer both kinesthetic and auditory learning technical occupations than those numbers suggest. Also, training people tend to be kinesthetic learners.

If you are trying to communicate something new to someone (like a client), you tend to communicate in the way you would like to be communicated to, reflecting your own preferences. For example, if you are a visual learner, you will create beautiful graphics and fancy documents to communicate. If your client is an auditory learner, he or she does not want the picture; that client wants words, short and brief. This mismatch creates a barrier to communication.

In certain situations, you may have to learn something fast. Perhaps your training department has arranged for video training in Windows Me to be held during lunch. You go to the video presentation and come out sleepy and with no idea what you just saw. Chances are you are not a visual learner. If you are a kinesthetic learner, your time might have been better spent playing around with Windows Me. If you are an auditory learner, you may have learned more listening to an audiotape. Faster learning comes from better choices of learning media.

**The Multiple Intelligences**

Whereas intake styles reflect how people prefer to receive information, the intelligences reflect how people prefer to process information. Howard Gardner, from Harvard University, has been challenging the basic beliefs about intelligence since the early 1980s. Gardner believes that intelligence is more multifaceted than has been thought and that traditional measurements, like IQ tests and SATs, do not accurately measure all its facets. He also says intelligence is not fixed. He defines intelligence as:

- a measurable aptitude
- an aptitude you use to create and solve problems
- an aptitude valued by the culture.
In *Frames of Mind*, Gardner (1985) describes his initial list of intelligences. In 1987, he added three additional intelligences to his list and said he expects the list to continue to grow. The intelligences are

- **interpersonal**: aptitude for working with others
- **logical/mathematical**: aptitude for math, logic, deduction
- **spatial/visual**: aptitude for picturing, seeing
- **musical**: aptitude for musical expression
- **linguistic/verbal**: aptitude for the written/spoken word
- **intrapersonal**: aptitude for working alone
- **bodily kinesthetic**: aptitude for being physical
- **emotional**: aptitude for identifying emotion
- **naturalist**: aptitude for being with nature
- **existential**: aptitude for understanding one’s purpose.

How does this affect your learning? Gardner believes that most people are comfortable in three to four of these intelligences and avoid the others. For example, if you are not comfortable working with others, doing group case studies may interfere with your ability to process new material. Video-based instruction will not be good for people with lower spatial and visual aptitudes. People with strong bodily and kinesthetic aptitudes need to move around while they are learning.

If you find you are in a situation where you have to use an aptitude that you are not comfortable with, you may need to practice this aptitude or enhance it with others in which you feel competent. For example, if your job requires you to study large technical documents but you are not strong in visual and spatial, you may find that drawing on your strong bodily and kinesthetic aptitude by taking notes, taking frequent moving breaks, or highlighting will help you adjust. Knowing your own strengths and weaknesses can allow you to positively transform a learning situation.

**The Whole Brain**

There has been a great deal of research done on right- and left-brain behaviors. Your left brain’s job is words, language, analysis, order, logic, numbers, and sequence. Your right brain’s job is music, rhythm, imagination, patterns, mental models, appreciation, and synthesis. Most people think with both, but have a strong preference to think on one side or the other. A left-brain person will tend to be very organized—the clean-desk syndrome. A right-brain person will tend to be nonlinear—the messy-desk syndrome. Real power comes from combining the two; when the right and left brain are combined, long-term learning occurs.

If you prefer left-brain thinking, you will migrate toward left-brain topics—mathematics, programming, problem solving (partitioning of problems). If you prefer right-brain
thinking, you will migrate toward right brain topics—patterns, modeling, synthesis of different disciplines. During a reengineering project, for example, it is clear that both sides are needed. A practitioner needs to think analytically and sequentially (left brain) but also needs to be able to synthesize conflicting views and imagine new approaches (right brain). Recognize your own preferences and practice stepping into the side of the brain you are least comfortable with.

The Triune Brain

The “triune” brain is composed of three functional areas: neocortex, limbic, and reptilian. The limbic system deals with the emotional aspects of learning. Think of your most vivid memories. Generally, they are “hooked” to a strong emotion, often negative. Emotions power learning. Negative emotions turn learning off; positive emotions turn it on. One of the best emotions for learning is fun. Whether planning a seminar or a meeting, the organizers should be asking, “How can we make learning fun?”

The reptilian brain is the front gate to the neocortex. If you are threatened, the reptilian brain will figuratively shut, blocking any new learning from getting in. This fight-or-flight syndrome means that it is nearly impossible to learn under pressure. The reptilian brain fights, and the neocortex takes flight. Thinking and learning occur in the neocortex so triggering a reptilian response is fatal to learning.

Think how much change has occurred since 1977 when Ken Olsen, head of Digital Equipment Corporation, said, “There is no reason for a person to have a computer in their home.” However, mandatory learning, driven by the pace of business and technology change, is physiologically impossible. Learning can only be achieved when people are relaxed, open, and responsive. As Peter Senge (1990) says, “The harder you push, the harder the system pushes back.”

In terms of yourself, what environment do you need to be productive in learning? Are there elements that can be changed that limit your reptilian response to learning? The best way to ensure that we are helping people to learn to learn and, therefore, learn to adapt to the world is by honoring the diverse needs of the learners who are using AL.

Related Interventions

Accelerated learning has similarities to brain-based learning, whole-brain learning, and thematic instruction.

- **Brain-based learning:** Many people (generally people in the field of kindergarten through grade 12, or K-12, education) who were originally working in accelerated learning now refer to their work as brain-based learning.
- **Whole-brain learning:** Ned Herrmann (1996; and now his daughters) promotes learning around the four brain dominance quadrants that he defined in his research. I believe whole-brain learning is included in AL.
- **Thematic instruction:** Promoted by Susan Kovalik, this approach to teaching (K-12) designed materials around a theme. Instead of teaching math, reading, science, and social studies as separate, disconnected thought areas, thematic instruction combined all the disciplines around a topic, for example, the Civil War. Many of the thematic instruction people leverage Howard Gardner’s work with multiple intelligence and the experimental schools he started called the Key Schools.

When to Use AL

Michael Treacy and Fred Wiersema (1995) noted in their book *The Discipline of Market*
Leaders that, because of the constantly changing world of new technology and business, business people are aging like dogs, with one year equal to seven years. If you have experienced the sinking feeling that you cannot keep up but you must, that the world has changed, that you do not have enough time, that you will lose your job, then change your strategy. Instead of trying to learn harder, learn better.

AL is a philosophy that helps people build a structure that focuses on each individual’s ability to learn more with less effort. It also supports the concept of personal mastery described by Peter Senge (1990) in *The Fifth Discipline*. Increased learning capacity lowers stress, reduces conflicts, and builds self-esteem. In contrast, ineffective learning increases stress, triggers blame, and challenges feelings of self-worth.

Figure 1-2 is a template for building your own learning profile. As you complete it, you will better understand how AL can help you in all aspects of your life. This profile includes

- learning beliefs
- intake styles
- multiple intelligences
- whole brain
- triune brain.

**When Not to Use Accelerated Learning**

Like all other learning interventions, accelerated learning should only be applied in situations in which performers have a documented skill and knowledge gap. Accelerated learning programs will only worsen problems that are the result of a lack of proper motives, tools, or processes. It is also important to remember to focus on the outcome that you wish people to produce, not the new behaviors you are trying to teach. Performers must never get the impression that you are using accelerated learning merely to manipulate the way they do things. If, during the learning process, performers can demonstrate that they have a better way of producing the same accomplishment, be sure to recognize their approach. Always remember that accelerated learning is a highly personalized and intimate approach toward improving performance. Therefore, we must never impose our own preferences onto others.

**Examples**

- **Hog Heaven Problem:** I was asked to help a marketing manager build a three-day sales conference. Audience members were salespeople in the Far East (English as a second language) who were chicken experts. They sold chicken health products, but were now going to be selling hog health products. The manager had three days to teach them hog basics and how to sell the hog products. We had two days to build the program. Previously, he had lectured, and he already had thousands of overheads ready, but he agreed that did not work.

  We narrowed the behavior that he wanted to see: a basic understanding of hogs and the ability to sell two specific products for hog health—one for pneumonia and one for dysentery. Here are some of the techniques we implemented with remarkable retention and success:

  — **Intervention:** Teach salespeople to create pig balloon animals with pink balloons. Demonstrate how to do it. Give them the supplies, but do not give them a pump to blow up the balloons (these kinds of balloons are really hard to blow up). As they struggle, tell them, “That’s how the pig with pneumonia and the farmer taking care of it feels.” Now, give them a faulty pump with the competitor’s name on it. It can blow up a little, but not much.
1. Learning Ghosts:

My learning ghosts are: ________________________________________________________________
Work History _______________________________________________________________________
Classroom History ____________________________________________________________________
Time/Life Demands ____________________________________________________________________
I am not good at _________________________________ because _____________________________
I am not good at _________________________________ because _____________________________
I will exorcise my ghosts by ______________________________________________________________________

2. Intake Styles

Circle the things you do a lot from the lists below. By observing in which columns your preferences fall, you will have a quick look at your learning preferences.

- form mind pictures
- take notes
- use color codes
- watch TV
- watch movies
- use charts, graphs
- use maps
- demonstrate
- draw/use drawings
- use mnemonics
- say syllables
- use mnemonics
- listen to tapes
- watch TV
- listen to music
- listen to speakers
- read aloud
- make up poems
- talk to yourself
- have discussions
- write
- write lists
- pace/walk as you work
- breathe slowly
- role play
- exercise
- dance
- write

Your learning preference is:

- Visual
- Auditory
- Kinesthetic

3. The Multiple Intelligences

For each aptitude, choose the three or four you feel you are strongest in. Also select the ones you presently use most often at work and in your personal life.

- Interpersonal
- Logical/mathematical
- Spatial/visual
- Musical
- Linguistic/verbal
- Intrapersonal
- Bodily/kinesthetic
- Emotional
- Naturalist
- Existential
4. The Whole Brain

Circle the words that you prefer (one per row):

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<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>IV</th>
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<td>inclusive</td>
<td>pieces</td>
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<tr>
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<td>geometry</td>
<td>thought</td>
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</tr>
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Total:
A. Column I and III: Left-brain preference
B. Column II and IV: Right-brain preference

The closer together these numbers are, the more flexible a learner you are.

5. The Learning Environment

Do you learn best in total, partial, or no quiet?
1. When others are talking, is it hard or easy for you to concentrate?
2. When the TV or radio is on, is it hard or easy for you to concentrate?
3. When the room is very, very quiet, is it hard or easy for you to concentrate?

Would you prefer learning in dim or bright lighting?

Would you prefer to learn in cool or warmth?

Physically, where do you prefer to work: at a table or less formally on the couch or floor? Do you prefer to sit in one place or move around?
1. Where do you go to work if you really have to concentrate?
2. Where do you go to work at home if you really have to concentrate?
3. Do you prefer to sit in one place when you work or move around?

Are you motivated by self, management, or family in terms of learning and development?
1. When you finish a large project, do you put it away or show it to others?
2. Do you talk about your work successes at home to your family?
3. Which one is most like you: I’m proud of the work I do? Nobody cares what anyone does at our work?

Is it difficult or easy for you to finish things that you start?
1. When you are working on a new project, do you sometimes leave it unfinished, or do you finish it no matter how long it takes?
2. Do you often forget things you’ve been asked to do?
3. Do you often set up a project to work on, but then work on something else?
4. Is it hard for you to finish projects?
Do you need structure when you work or learn, or do you prefer to work freestyle?

1. When you get a new project, do you prefer that your manager tell you exactly what is required and how to do it, or do you prefer to figure some things out yourself?
2. When you are working on a project, do you prefer ongoing directions on what to do next, or do you prefer to be left alone?
3. Do you like to work on one or many things at a time?

In what situations do you work better, alone or with others?

1. Do you like to work on projects with others or by yourself?
2. When you have a very important project to get done, or something very critical to learn, do you prefer to work with others or by yourself?

Review the market differentiators. Now give them a snazzy pump with the product name: That's it!

— Intervention: A vet talked for too long on hog basics, and the salespeople were all given a huge binder of information. To keep it lively, we used Lecture BINGO, a Thiagi technique. Whenever the vet used a term, the participants could mark it on their BINGO card. When they had BINGO, they stood up and had to define their terms to win.

— Intervention: We used the “disappearing water powder,” sold by Trainers Warehouse, to demonstrate the problems with dysentery. Let’s not talk about this . . . . The result was better-than-usual sales, better retention of new product information, and enthusiastic salespeople (and trainers). Quote from senior executive to head of HR, “What the h_____ did you do to that trainer?!! Well, whatever it was, do it to the rest of them!”

◆ Ponderous Process Problem: When teaching a boring process, the following are a couple of tips we use:

— Intervention: List each process step on a strip of paper and put the strips in an envelope. Have teams compete to put the strips in the right order using the documentation. They learn to navigate the documentation and support information and teach themselves the process.

— Intervention: Play the game of clue. Break people into teams, devise clues, and have the teams discover from the clues what role, what milestone, what deliverable, which phase, and so forth. Again, give them the support materials and documentation to self-discover. For more fun, create color-coded hats or pennies to make the teams like the board game (Colonel Mustard, Miss Scarlet, and so forth).

AL is also appropriate for speaking, newsletters, trade show booths, and any other place you need to communicate effectively.

**Design Guidelines**

The best design criteria for AL is to

♦ Focus on the learner.
♦ Lecture as a last resort (fewer than 20 percent of the learning experience).
♦ Allow people to discover learning. Do not pour it into them.
♦ Create simulation activities that are close enough to the real world that
learners will easily apply the information and retain it.

◆ Always keep learning safe. The reptilian brain prevents learning.

◆ Map flow to the multiple intelligences. For example, each activity in a session should map to all seven (if not 10) multiple intelligences. If you have just done a highly interpersonal learning experience, follow it with a highly intrapersonal experience. This validation ensures that people are able to learn with the least amount of energy expended, and so can learn and retain with ease. And their brains will not get full so fast.

Some techniques associated with AL are frequently misunderstood, implemented badly, and characterized incorrectly. A technique can be applied in a way that honors each learner’s diversity and the needs of the business, or it can be applied in a way that disregards both. For example, many AL practitioners have researched how music can help people learn. By leveraging what has been researched, the appropriate music can be played at the appropriate time to increase learning. In contrast, the wrong music can be played just about any time, or music can be played at inappropriate times. In those cases, learning has not been accelerated.

Similarly, many traditional AL practitioners applied passive and active imagery (guided meditation) to their learning events. When done by a person with the appropriate skills, this type of imagery can be a powerful magnifier of learning. Other AL practitioners choose different techniques to accelerate learning. That does not mean that they are not accelerating learning; it just means they choose other techniques to accomplish the goals.

Finally, some AL practitioners have rigid methodologies and steps for implementation of AL. In my opinion, the very rigidity of these methods encourages developers to focus on the method and not the outcome. The core value of AL is its focus on the learner, and this focus dictates certain flexibility since people are far from predictable.

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

◆ Do not call it accelerated learning and do not use the word fun.

◆ Leverage the speed of learning and the retention to make a business case. No one will fund wacky, entertaining stuff in today’s business climate.

◆ Be clear what behavioral changes are required by the business: How will you measure the success or failure of this learning? I call these learning objectives, but it is critical that all parties be constantly aware of the “why.”

◆ Ease into it. Take people from where they are to where they can go. Everybody moves at a different pace. If one day you were lecturing to them nonstop, and the next day you are zooming around the room in a princess costume, burning incense, playing spooky music, and flying a kite, people are going to go reptilian. Change one thing at a time.

◆ You have the creative genius to really help people. Give yourself permission to do it.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

Books

**Internet**
Imaginative Concepts, 1922 Buckington Drive, Chesterfield, MO 63017; phone: 314.207.6452; email: pahager@worldnet.att.net.

**Associations**