

Experience Learning

By Keith Eric Grant, PhD, NCTMB

Okay, now that I've gotten that off my chest, I base my entire workshop curriculum on what I know from working with clients on a day-to-day basis. Nothing that I deliver is theoretical or academic. It's the real thing, with lots of real examples and discussion of issues that I know most organizations face every day.

- *Madeline Stanionis (traveling trainer)*³

There are multiple reasons to take a class or workshop as continuing education. Sometimes the motivation is simply to accumulate points for some organizational or licensing requirement. Sometimes the motivation comes from having heard that some instructor or course is particularly "great." Both can be factors, but will serve you better if you give yourself time and space for a bit of planning. Training serves best when it is put to early use that moves it toward experience.

The first part of what makes a class a good match for you should come from self-reflection about your current practice. Think about things you may have started doing in the recent past, simply because your mix of clients or practice context has changed. If there are techniques or areas of knowledge that you are using but don't feel comfortable with, you've just identified a class you should find. Look for an instructor or teaching group that can fill in and smooth out these areas. One clue for you is that a potential instructor should be able to clearly state how what he/she offers will reinforce your skills and knowledge in your weak areas. If the instructor can't do that, look elsewhere.

Compare what you are offering in your practice now and what you would like to be offering a few years from now. Literally visualize yourself in that role, moving through your day. Confirm that your activities and place feel right for who you are or want to become. Create a transition plan that identifies the steps you need to take to acquire new skills and knowledge, and turn them incrementally into solid experience. Now

you have a path and a catalog to guide your course shopping.

The second part of what should draw you toward a class has to do with learning itself. Some recent research on the process of learning has looked at what makes particular video games popular and what occurs as people learn to play them.¹⁻² One concept that came out of this research was that students prosper when the subject matter challenges them right at the edge of their abilities. Make the lessons too difficult and the students get frustrated. Make them too easy and people get bored. Further concepts noted that practicing new forms of visual and kinesthetic perception literally enhances the ability to perceive, whatever the starting point. A final observation was that, while initially a lot of attention and effort was required, mastery, taking as little as a month to occur, brought a quieting of the brain as measured by the rate of glucose use.

Applying the thoughts above, look for material that challenges you step by step but doesn't confound you. Make sure that the step-in ability is based on where you are currently and equally - that it is indeed a step outside of your current comfort area. Look for presenters who draw you in, include you, and challenge your participation. Look for those whose joy of teaching reaches toward your own joy of learning and doing. Enjoy the process in its challenges to your mind and body skills, and cherish where, with a bit of planning, it can take you.

Oddly enough, then, confronting what was, for me, a new form of learning and thinking was both frustrating and life enhancing. This was a state that I could remember from my days in graduate school and earlier in my career (and when I changed careers midstream). Having long routinized my ways of learning and thinking, however, I had forgotten this state. It brought back home to me, forcefully, that learning is or should be both frustrating and life enhancing so that people keep going and don't fall back on learning and thinking only what is simple and easy."¹

References

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3. Stanionis, Madeline and Sharon Adam. The traveling trainers: Madeline Stanionis and Sharon Adam. *Tech Soup* October 21, 2002. www.techsoup.org/howto/articlepage.cfm?ArticleId=420&topicid=9.

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