

HOW TO INSULT THE LEARNER

You may remember back in the 1980s, our industry had a habit of categorizing training participants into “prisoner,” “tourist” and “learner” groups. In fact, facilitators would begin workshops with these broad labels, stating that 2/3 of the people probably did not really want to be there. Clearly the “prisoners” and “tourists” were a problem—flawed individuals with their poor attitudes on display. The facilitator would ask (beg?) everyone to try to be a learner today. Bless the evolved “learners,” for they shall inherit the instructor’s wisdom.

When you think about it, any participant could feel this attitude to be profoundly insulting. And I mean *profoundly* insulting.

There are other assumptions alive today that undergird the classic approach to organizational learning. See if you don’t think these assumptions ring true. Participants:

- Are good when they come to the program ready to learn.
- Have knowledge and experience gaps that need to be filled with outside data.
- Understand that they are deficient in some way that relates to the training.
- Believe the class will be good for them, will fix their deficiencies.
- Lack the wherewithal to decide whether or not they need the program; they need to be sent by their boss, again, to get fixed.

Let’s have a little respect

Adults have a lot going for them. They’ve been around. They’ve had years of schooling of one form or another. They’re all grown up—which leads to a sense of autonomy, even confidence. Keeping themselves—and others—alive for years on end means they have at least decent decision-making ability, and can be counted as good enough in being practical, purposeful and self-directed. They’ve had their own experiences, so they have a point of view. This hard-earned point of view might just make them a little less open-minded and receptive to change.

Research confirms that the most potent motivators are internal, not external. Adults need to know why it’s important to learn something, and how learning can genuinely help them. For the most part, they’re sure they were doing just fine before the L&D people entered their lives. For adults, learning is not about taking in new stuff; it’s about growth—personal and/or professional development.

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Stop the insults

How do we stop insulting adult learners?

At JMReid Group, we believe program participants—in all forms—deserve respect, which has led us to creating learner-centric experiences. Our designs and deliveries connect participants' growth objectives to their organization's objectives. Instead of focusing on what we think people need to learn, we let them learn what they value—so we can all support the outcomes for which they're accountable.

We author and lead learning environments that:

- **Honor the wisdom in the room.** More than sharing others' thinking, our role as learning designers is to elicit the learners' thinking. We embrace them as intelligent, experienced adults whose ideas and feelings should be respected and built on.
- **Leverage an innovative approach.** Fostering and encouraging risk-taking, mistake-making, experimentation and creativity.
- **Are contextual.** We create programs that point to immediate application to the learners' real world, based on the latest research in that area.
- **Offer choice.** Participants take responsibility for their own learning every step of the way.
- **Are experiential in nature.** Learners learn by doing. Participants and facilitators get close and really talk, and the shared activities and experiences bring content and theory to life.

JMReid Group customizes solutions led by skilled facilitators—all focused on your performance improvement efforts. Let JMReid Group help you. Your program participants will thank you.