

WHY TRADITIONAL TRAINING DOESN'T WORK

Seek first to understand – but do your training providers?

One well-known training company references within its leadership content this advice from the Prayer of St. Francis – first seek to understand before attempting to be understood. This proverbial aphorism, which is easy to embrace, is foundational in many training companies' communication and leadership content, as well as our own.

Yet, this same core belief about human communication and connection rarely shows up in the way training companies design and deliver their training solutions. Most training companies lead with their model or process. ***They seek first to have participants understand their model and process!*** Their training design looks something like the following (what they do – *what they mean*):

- Introduce model/concept or process – *understand our brilliant model, our “oatmeal”*
- Support model with validated or un-validated research – *our view is widely known and has been around a long time, so you really ought to love it*
- Ask participants to explore the concept through discussion – *okay c'mon, you love this model, eat up*
- Apply model/concept through case study, application, experience – *we are going for the close here: now try to digest it in this contrived, generic application*

The whole conversation revolves around the central model/concept – a veritable kabuki dance to convince participants that *this* model/concept is the solution to their leadership needs and shortcomings. Training companies subscribe to this design process because:

1. Their economic model of intellectual property fees forces them to value their off-the-shelf content ahead of learner relevance and engagement.
2. It is really easy to create static off-the-shelf programs – that can be reused from one client to another.
3. They need designs that are either painless for less experienced facilitators to deliver or involve more costly train-the-trainers. However, by their nature, these designs position the facilitator as the only knowledgeable person in the room, which stifles participants' voices and overlooks their perspectives and experience. ***Higher skilled facilitators who utilize this sort of content constantly share with us how they have to “make it work” for their learners.***

Traditional training companies assume the model is the answer. They excel at publishing sequels (workbooks, daily reflections), revitalizing the model to extend shelf-life (quick, think of a ninth habit) or bringing out the next version that is today's “answer.” We believe that participants are being undernourished despite being overfed models and processes. The idea of seeking to understand the participants' world is foundational to the design and delivery of adult learning. Learners are rich and complex human beings. We believe they want to be understood as such first – before they want to understand a model or a process.

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How we seek to understand first

We start with the core belief that:

Context is King – The initial spend should be to ensure that a program is relevant to the learner and reflects the company's strategy and leadership needs. To think that a program built in 1996 magically fits (and needs no customization) for the presenting issue of a company in 2016 is farcical – and yet it happens. Discovery, focus groups, tailoring and a passion to “get it right” are part of our design process.

Design is Queen – Getting the participants to talk early and often about their world and the subject matter at hand, prior to introducing any model or concept, is critical.

Content is the Jack – Content and models are important but, in our minds, the least important consideration – yet *their* content is what gets the most attention and emphasis from our peers in the industry. Solid content/models needn't be complex and involve speaking a foreign language. More important is that the leadership principles are “sticky” – memorable and a fit with the company culture. Our design and delivery approach, therefore, looks like the following:

- Start and end with the business and leadership context – *seek first to understand the big picture.*
- Share the latest thinking in the area at hand (change, coaching, teams, etc.) – no model or process allowed here – *to frame the topic that we will be discussing.*
- Ask participants to review the latest thinking, listening for what resonates with them in their world and the questions it generates – *to give them the opportunity to provide their personal context to the topic.*
- Explore the beliefs, attitudes, challenges and tensions that exist when addressing any leadership issue in their real world – *to give them the opportunity (wait for it) to be understood.*
- Introduce a model or concept – *now they are ready to understand a model or solution and its fit with their situation.*
- Apply through real play – *now they are ready to learn and apply.*

Core to all of this is that **people remember what they say – not what you say.** Advising people to first seek to understand before attempting to be understood is easy. Having participants embrace this (and any) concept requires a training design and company that models this belief.

Let JMReid Group help you. Your learners (employees) will thank you.