

THE HUMAN SIDE

Lend Me Your Ears

Stories from all sides
of the classroom

By Josephine Rossi

When Human Side debuted last year in our February issue, the first article was about creating enthusiasm. The next two featured equally distinct subjects: a civilian training program for the U.S. military and a pilgrimage across northern Spain.

In between those stories, however, I received submissions from readers who have been inspired and touched by the world of learning in subtler ways. Some wrote about colleagues who taught them to be better, more compas-

sionate people. Others talked about specific learning experiences that completely changed their professional tracks. And one even confessed that she was able to adjust her personality and teaching methods to become a more “holistic” trainer because of some tough feedback.

From those emails and manuscripts, a few stories have stuck in my mind. So, I thought that I'd share them with you as a way to wrap up the column's first year

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and encourage you to write to me with your own story of inspiration.

Trainer's tale

The first story comes from David Xander, a training manager in Columbus, Ohio. He writes about an experience that exemplifies the power of training and helped focus his career on adult education.

Early in my career, I spent my days teaching high school social studies and my nights instructing firefighters for local fire departments. One evening, I was reading the newspaper and saw a story on a department that I had recently trained. There had been a house fire the previous night and the firefighters did an outstanding job of fighting the blaze.

A short time later, the phone rang. It was the department's fire chief. Before I had a chance to congratulate him on the fine job his people had done, he congratulated me on the great stop I made on the fire. I reminded him that I wasn't even there, but he disagreed. “You were the one who taught us a new hose load that allowed us to pull our hose faster and with no kinks,” he said. “You were the one who made us practice donning our breathing apparatus until we could do it in our sleep. You were the one who taught us better ways of advancing hose and applying water.” He said that his firefighters were so excited about their success that they couldn't stop talking about it.

That incident convinced me that my future was in adult education, and I have never tired of the opportunity to work with students who want to learn and can immediately apply their skills. I know that those

firefighters did a great job that night. I also know that my classes helped them perform better than even they believed possible.

Colleague appreciation

Another striking story comes not from a teacher, but from a participant. Angie Johnson, from Webster City, Iowa, explains how her friend and colleague, Loretta Leman, touches the lives of her participants.

Loretta has been our company's trainer for 18 years, and almost every one of our 141 employees has had the privilege of learning from her. Loretta teaches not by the book but from her heart. She genuinely cares for her participants and gives each of them 150 percent in every training session.

But, Loretta does more than teach; she affects her participants profoundly. For example, when instructing sessions on teambuilding, effective behaviors, and interpersonal skills, Loretta meets with employees on a monthly basis. She takes time to get to know us as individuals and then shows us how to work together to accomplish goals. As a result, many of us have changed our personal habits: We've quit smoking, started eating better, learned to cooperate with co-workers, and started managing our time more productively. And she's personally inspired me to be a better wife, mother, employee, and friend.

Loretta often tells others, “I want to help you so that you don't make the same mistakes I did.” She'll put herself in our shoes to better understand our individual problems. And she's always willing to lis-

ten no matter the topic—marriage, parenting, or career choices. It's truly a pleasure to work beside such a wonderful person every day. I know I'm a better person because of her.

Successful classrooms

I also came across the story of MicroTek, which offers ready-to-use training facilities and support staff in 1000 classrooms worldwide. The San Francisco-based company specializes in going above and beyond for the trainers and students who use its facilities.

Founder Don Silvensky got the idea to start the niche company from his experiences providing training logistics for the Eastman Kodak Company. Fed up with rental computers, ill-equipped hotel conference rooms, power failures, and other obstacles, Silvensky realized that a full-service training facility would solve those problems.

His classrooms offer high-tech amenities and an accommodating staff that's ready to help in a crisis. MicroTek staff is known to sew on loose buttons for instructors, bake cookies, babysit pets, and even fix flat tires for trainers—all in an effort to make learning an enjoyable and stress-free experience.

“You have to understand that a lot of these trainers have lonely lives,” says Laura Bialkowski, manager of the Washington, D.C., facility. “They travel three weeks out the month.... So, we like to create an environment where they feel comfortable. If the instructors and students are happy, everyone wins.”

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