

TRAINING 101

Learning Partnerships

By Barry Lyerly and
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The business world is similar to a jungle: It tries to sustain a delicate balance of interacting elements. You can help learners achieve and maintain balance in the business jungle by building natural partnerships for learning. Through such partnerships, you and your trainees can counterbalance the seemingly chaotic, rapid changes in the current work culture.

No longer should you view participants as empty vessels waiting to receive wisdom flowing from the instructor.

That old model of training is giving way to a more democratic model: the learning partnership. Trainers who use the new model recognize and release the unique talents and wisdom of participants and act as learning partners. Sharing knowledge power is what natural learning partnerships are all about.

Sharing power requires speaking and listening from your heart. When listening as a learning partner, you lead people by empowering them to share their

Illustration by Riccardo Stampatori

insights. The learning partnership is also characterized by mutual admiration, which can mean that the trainer and participants sometimes reverse roles. Experienced trainers know that the answers are out there with the learners and not in the trainer's head.

Are you ready?

Take the self-assessment to see whether you're ready to lead as a learning partner. The assessment focuses on these essential elements: the trainer's own insight and role, a climate for self-discovery, and a focus on applying knowledge. When those elements are in balance, the result is satisfied learners, trainers, and organizations.

Questions 1 through 4 ask you to examine your role. Why are you a trainer? The field of training and development attracts many types of people with different motivations, behavior styles, and approaches to learning. An honest assessment of your core values lies at the heart of personal and professional development.

Learning leaders must become intimately familiar with learners' needs, culture, and business. Intimacy involves nonstop assessment of learner attitudes and beliefs. You can perform assessments through formal needs analysis and informal information gathering.

Too often, trainers use a tone that may wrongly convey an attitude of superiority. Learning is more effective when you become a learning partner and acknowledge that participants are savvy and insightful. A trainer may possess intellectual knowledge that's useful to share, but learners are often more adept at applying that knowledge.

As a trainer, you bring your own approach to your work. Reflecting your unique style, create a service motto that is clear, concise, and compelling. The motto will provide even more meaning, direction, and focus to the work you and learners are doing. A service motto always focuses on serving, embracing Robert Greenleaf's concept of servant-leadership,

Self-Assessment: Are You Ready to Train From the Heart?

Directions: Indicate your level of agreement with the statements below, and write your score in the right-hand column.

Always (5)	Frequently (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)
1. I am clear about why I am a trainer and what motivates me.				
2. I am educated as to my audience's needs and culture.				
3. I know what it means to be a learning partner, and I practice it.				
4. I have a personal service motto that guides my work.				
5. I am using my natural style to the best of my ability.				
6. I am adept at listening to learn before, during, and after training.				
7. I can ask great questions before, during, and after training.				
8. I can facilitate team learning to promote shared leadership.				
9. I know how to help learners apply knowledge after training.				
10. I include a commitment-to-action process in my training initiatives.				
11. I am skilled at one-on-one coaching for results.				
12. I keep abreast of workplace trends that affect training.				

Total _____

Scoring: Add up your points, and interpret your score according to the scale below.

60 to 48 You are using resources wisely.

47 to 36 You are aware of some resources, but you could make better use of them.

35 to 24 You need to give more attention to the immediate resources around you.

23 to 0 You are either not aware of your resources or do not know how to use them.

as described in *The Leader as Servant*.

Servant leadership is reflected in these examples of service mottoes:

- Discover each person's unique voice.
- Reveal the creativity in everyone.
- Add value.
- Have fun while learning.

Questions 5 through 8 focus on how to use resources to achieve a climate for learning. Experienced trainers learn to trust and use their natural presentation and facilitation styles over time, but beginners can develop their natural abilities quickly. First, analyze instances when you feel especially comfortable in the learning environment. Next, practice specific communication skills such as sharing personal stories, successes, and failures. Last, refer to feedback from sources such as videotape, peers, and

mentors to anchor your awareness.

Learn to listen, and listen to learn. It's a myth that good listeners are just being nice. Good listeners are also smart. They know that listening involves asking questions that uncover the wisdom of other people and the collective insight of your learning team. Great questions stimulate people's natural curiosity and provide a link to the real world.

Leaders know how to develop a team of learners by listening powerfully, probing correctly, and balancing tasks with the morale needs of learning team members. An effective learning team is similar to a jazz band improvising: Within a common musical framework, all of the members contribute their unique talents to the whole. To generate that kind of alignment, you need to

- establish a friendly and collegial atmosphere
- create team values
- rotate leadership within the team
- balance individual needs with team goals
- attend to the physical environment.

When you apply those team skills wisely, the results are the whole-hearted participation of members, shared wisdom, and the application of people's insights to their work.

Questions 9 through 12 encourage you to think about the transfer of training to the

workplace. Personal commitment is key to natural learning partnerships. After all, learning begins with one person's willingness to commit to personal or professional development. Build into your training design such elements as pre-work, preliminary commitment making, final declarations, and peer support at work.

As you develop rapport with learners, they'll naturally want more individualized coaching. Activities can vary from informal exchanges to formal executive coaching sessions. The effective coach applies his or her coaching skills with integrity and honesty, and assumes that the person being coached is able and wise, not needy and dependent.

If you're truly ready for the future, you're able to meet the challenge of change brought about by the Internet and other technology, and you're knowledgeable about how that technology has changed training delivery and communication in the business climate.

The concept of a learning partnership acknowledges that trainers can learn as much from the participants as participants learn from trainers. The result is more self-reliance and confidence for the learners and greater satisfaction for both the leader and learners. As you continue to focus on the elements of role, climate, and application, you'll uncover your natural ability to forge learning partnerships with your learners, and you'll begin to use your natural resources more creatively.

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