



## PRESIDENT'S PAGE

GORDON L. LIPPITT

# CONCEPTS OF LEARNING AND THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Those of us engaged in training and development need to be knowledgeable about the beliefs and skills involved in the learning process, about the research, theories, and concepts advocated and discussed today. Let me cite some generalizations about learning that might help us see in perspective our training and development responsibilities.

### 1. All Human Beings Learn

Even older adults can learn. The old adage that you "can't teach an old dog new tricks" is wrong. It is just more difficult because the elderly have learned some wrong attitudes and skills.

### 2. Learning Is An Active Process

People learn best when they are actively involved and interact with the teacher, boss, fellow students, environment, and learning stimulus. One does not learn by being passive. I believe in reflection, but for learning to be effected this must be an active process of synthesis and usually requires proper environmental conditions.

### 3. Learning Is Individualistic

Each person learns in accordance with his own personality, perception, expectation, and readiness. Persons attending a learning experience will go away with different things that they have learned.

### 4. Learning takes Place At Various Levels

Learning experiences must be planned to fit the student's level of knowledge, skill and attitude:

#### — Knowledge Level

This level of learning may be achieved through managing, conditioning, one-way communication, or similar approaches. It should not be confused with *application* of the knowledge.

#### — Skill Level

This level of learning requires adaptation and practice. Being able to convert intentions and knowledge into practical results requires learning in the "action" context and will utilize role playing, skill practices, video tape feedback plus practice, and other action-oriented methods of learning.

#### — Attitude Level

At this level of learning we are dealing with perceptions, past experiences, and values. Learning which produces changes in attitude is much harder to achieve—it will require more sophisticated methods such as confrontation learning, laboratory training, or sensory experiencing.

These three levels of learning must be considered if we are to achieve and maintain *performance change* as a result of a training and development activity. Those of us involved in the educational process should have performance improvement as a goal, rather than the mere acquisition of new words, gimmicks, or temporary responses that slip back into the same routine because change was not "fully" learned or reinforced. This is the challenge for all of us as we assess the needs of our organizations, design learning experiences, and evaluate the effect of our efforts.