

Rebellion: How to Change Your Approach to Learning



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Resource Type: Risk eNews

Topic: General

“Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.”

– Benjamin Franklin

The desire to learn on the job is shared by employees from all generations, backgrounds and tenures. Yet promises made to new hires about “learning opportunities” are infrequently supported with practical advice about *how to continue learning while you work*. Humans have an extraordinary capacity for learning. We start learning when we’re born, and many of use will continue to learn even after our our bodies have become frail.

Few days go by when I’m not teaching AND learning. When I thank an audience at the end of a workshop, I often feel overwhelmed as well as grateful, for their candid stories, terrific questions, and willingness to engage and learn with me.

This week I had a chance to watch two talented members of my team teach a class on project management. I was not only a super proud supervisor I was grateful for the opportunity learn from their perspectives. After the training one of the attendees approached me and said, “Your staff seem so young, but they are so accomplished!” This learner’s comments caused me to reflect on the lessons that fuel my thirst for learning.

- **Focus on the message, not the messenger** — Although we’ve all heard the warning to not “shoot the messenger,” many adult learners miss the powerful messages of workshop leaders by becoming distracted with the presenter’s youth, accent, fashion faux-pas, or nervousness. Not every presenter with something meaningful to share is TED-Talk ready. Remind yourself to stop being petty and listen for the valuable life experiences the speaker is willing to share. Show your support for their courage by smiling, nodding, and responding when asked to participate in an audience poll.
- **Fixate on one thing** — One of the ways adult learners set themselves up for disappointment is by expecting too much. When you attend a 75-minute workshop, it’s a bit unrealistic to expect the speaker to hand you the keys to raising millions, the formula for predicting “Black Swan” risks, or the secret to insulating your nonprofit from liability. Instead of expecting the world, aim to learn ONE THING you can use to advance the mission of your nonprofit. Learning “one thing” in 75 minutes is an excellent use of your time!
- **Revel in the reminders** — When I ask audience members if they learned something new during my workshop, I often hear, “you helped me recall things I knew,” or “You reminded me of lessons long

forgotten.” I’ve come to realize that few people are able to recall the enormous volume of lessons we’ve learned over the years. A workshop that reminds us of valuable, but forgotten lessons, is a gift anew.

- **Take copious notes** — One of my greatest frustrations as a presenter is when an audience member sits stoically, takes no notes, and then asks me to send her my slides and notes. If you want to learn, take notes! Whether it’s a briefing by your nonprofit’s CEO, a presentation by a team of colleagues, or the remarks of a guest speaker, *taking notes is the best way to remember what you’ve heard* and how it relates to the mission-advancing work of your nonprofit. Stop making excuses and start taking notes.

Learning transforms a series of ordinary days into a life well-lived. Every life experience—from triumph to failure and tragedy—offers an opportunity to learn. Stop wasting these moments by resolving to learn each and every day from each and every person you encounter on your journey.

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