

ADULT LEARNING

Adult Learners are unlike children or young learners. Young learners have limited life experiences and are thought of as vessels to be filled. Adults on the other hand, are seeking to have the fire within lit up. Training should act as a catalyst.

Malcom Knowles theorized key aspects of adult learning:

1. Learning is a Lifelong Process. Adults see training as part of a developmental process. They are ready to learn when they experience a need for the additional knowledge and skills that will help them grow or accomplish tasks. Learning fills the gaps.
2. Adult Learners are Self-Directed and Goal Oriented. Adults accept responsibility for what they want to learn, and when and how to learn it. They want to participate in setting personal goals. And adults are motivated by both internal and external factors.
3. Adult Learners have Varied Experiences. They bring their unique set of experiences to the learning process and learn best when the training activities tap into and build on these, as well as address multiple learning styles.
4. Adults want Real-Life Applications. Adult learners want practical solutions to problems that they can apply in their life and work. Training works best when learners see how to make that happen.

Elements of effective training:

Training is based on imparting three elements:

Knowledge
Skills
Attitudes/Values

Learning is best accomplished when it is an active process. Adults should be given opportunities to engage in an activity, contemplate the content, see how the learning adds to what they already know, how it contributes to meeting a goal, reflect on meaning, and determine practical applications.

Trainings should follow this format:

WHAT? – Engage learners with the information, skill, value, knowledge, etc. that we want to impart. This can be done through lecture, activities, stories, visuals, discussion, problem solving, etc.

SO WHAT? – Learners need to process and de-brief the information – “Why is this important? What do I think of this? Do I need it? How does this relate to my past and current experiences? What’s in it for me?”

At this stage it is helpful to use both self-reflection as well as review and processing with others.

NOW WHAT? – Training should help learners summarize what was learned and determine real-life applications. “How will I use what I’ve learned? What first steps will I take?”

Trainings should cycle through this process many times

Things to Look For when evaluating training curriculum:

1. Do the learning objectives identify the change in behavior or attitude that is desired as a result of the training? How will the trainer as well as the learner know whether the objectives have been accomplished?
2. Is it clear what knowledge, skills and attitudes are being taught?
3. Does the training offer learners an opportunity to establish their own goals and/or get their personal needs met?
4. Do learners have opportunities to bring their own experiences to the learning?
5. Do learners have opportunities to share with and learn from others?
6. Are multiple methods used to engage different styles of learning?
7. Do the learners have opportunities to process what they’ve learned and what they still need or want to know? (“So What?”)
8. How will the learning be applied in “real life”? Are there opportunities for learners to start this process in the class? (“Now What?”)