



## Perhaps it's time for trainers to refresh their materials

Is our love of the old reducing the tendency of trainers to write brand new materials?

I was recently asked to submit a couple of ideas for inclusion in a short entry to this years HRD conference brochure. It was to address what I thought were some of the key challenges for the industry, and be 60 words long! I managed this one in 61 words:

**“Post Blackberry working behaviours are changing. We used to labour like battery hens, cooped up within the confines of our specialisms, but now we are required to behave more like free rangers! Providers have got to stop delivering old world ideas in new world situations. Too many churn out the same old materials, the challenge is finding those leading the way.”**

**A topic I thought would benefit from expansion, so we are going to take up this theme in our Spring iThink publication.**

### **Perhaps it's time for lots of trainers to refresh their materials?**

Yes of course specialisms still exist in the work place, they are unlikely to go away. It's just that our observation is that most of us have been let out of the battery hen cage, and now we have to pick our way through the hen run (read workplace) much more like free rangers, at least as far as soft skills are concerned. To be effective it seems we all believe a wide range of interrelationship and personal effectiveness skills are invaluable. The ability to 'put our hands to anything' to 'communicate at all levels' to 'lead every situation in a bespoke way' to 'motivate everyone we have contact with' etc etc, is not only a desirable level of capability in almost any modern workplace role, but it is the expected norm. Surely this is partly why the Learning and Skills Council tell us our companies spent £38bn on training in 2005 in the UK alone.

Now we live in the post blackberry age our working behaviours are being forced to change. Just the other week I was in a company lift with a course delegate who was singing the praise of his eMail capable phone, which enabled him to “utilise dead time like right now in this lift” he said. I hope my conversation wasn’t distracting him too much! It was another little reminder (one that you all will collectively have seen replicated many thousands of times), that it’s no longer just what we do that counts, it’s how we do it. Which decoded and translated really means ‘faster’, ‘harder’ and ‘better’. The challenge is always the ‘better’ piece, faster and harder just creeps up on us.

So as we all raise our game, embracing modern day change in true ‘who moved my cheese’ fashion, how is all the learning being delivered?

Sadly the answer seems to be, in not so different ways to that of 30 years ago! It appears that there are few truly innovative approaches to work place development, and there are lots of examples of something similar to before, just delivered a bit differently. When will the world of learning and development start producing modern day solutions to modern day problems? It’s too common to find courses preaching old world solutions to modern day problems, you know, things like “switching off your mobile to get some uninterrupted time” that feels to me like a very old way of dealing with a real life issue today. Is that what we really need?

The training world seems rife with the attitude that it’s OK to take 20, 30 or even 50 year old principles, package it up and deliver it as something fresh. Of course it’s the easy option compared to the energy required to research, develop and test new models and concepts.

So why aren’t training providers being more creative in solution design and delivery. Two factors may contribute, firstly client uncertainty with something really new, and secondly the more heinous crime of laziness on the part of the training providers.



**“I’m not sure about that...”**

There does seem to be an inherent fear of buying a training service that isn't steeped in concepts that have been around for decades. It's a risk to engage in something that hasn't been normed by tens of thousands of people, or that is already well known by many. In a similar way innovative approaches to the learning intervention are equally scary. I wouldn't mind a fiver for every time we have been told to “be creative on this one”, to find in presenting the ideas peoples faces give away the sudden loss of nerve. I'm not talking about off-the-planet whacky stuff either. It is definitely possible that a small c conservative approach to training solutions is actually hindering new, more exciting solutions which deliver what people need in their constantly changing chicken run!

**“It’s too easy to deliver the same old stuff”**

We have met a lot of trainers over the years, and when talking to them it is very easy to get the impression that they really have quite a small repertoire of material. Certainly they have the ability to deliver a whole range of solution topics, all tailored to the context, subject and client, but beneath the surface it's the same old models and concepts that are doing the rounds for the umpteenth time that month. Those that can demonstrate genuine originality or true intellectual property, who create from scratch when developing solutions are very rare indeed. It takes a lot of time and effort to generate top class original content, and few seem motivated to do it.



**So have we created for ourselves a self fulfilling prophecy? Trainers believe clients are unwilling to buy fresh original solutions, which makes them play safe when presenting their intervention ideas, that are well received by clients who feel more at ease with stuff they know or that's got history, which confirms there is no need to expend effort in being original in the mind of the trainers.**

**So instead the whole industry waits for the next big name publication to become a best seller before anything slightly new begins to trickle into training solutions around the globe. Oh, and stay there for the next fifty years, as we switch off our mobile phones and head for the familiar safety of that battery cage!**

**That's a lot of the same old stuff for £38bn.**

**Bob Bannister**