

Communication & Learning Styles

Training. Employees say they're not getting enough of it and employers say their employees don't take advantage of what they have to offer. What's the real scoop on training?

After having spent over thirty years in a highly technical field, my experience tells me that both employees and employers are right on the mark. How can that be?

There are three major factors: 1) most employers don't make the training process either convenient or enjoyable, 2) most employees resent being taken away from their jobs to be trained, 3) the actual trainers (for whatever reason) don't spend enough time doing the training.

Let's take factor #1 first, because factors #2 and #3 hinge on it. The majority of training takes place between new employees and their trainers. At this stage of the game, neither the trainer nor the new employee know much about the other: communication styles, learning styles, or expectations. Failing to determine all three is a huge oversight and one of the biggest contributors to both the trainer and employee feeling that the training experience is either wasted or not as beneficial as it could be.

Communication is conducted in one of three ways: passive, assertive, or aggressive. Learning is processed in one of three ways: visual, auditory, or hands-on. Most people communicate and learn, predominantly, in one of these three fashions, while using all three at varying times and to different degrees.

When communicating, a passive communicator tends to defer to the other party, minimizing his/her own opinions. An assertive communicator tends to behave as if both parties are equals, valuing both opinions. An aggressive communicator tends to be forceful and more focused on his/her opinions and less apt to compromise. When learning, if a person was told a

story and then asked if he understood it, a predominantly visual person might say, *Yes, I see what happened.* A predominantly auditory person might say, *Yes, I hear you.* And a predominantly hands-on person might say, *Yes, I feel your pain.* Understanding both communication and learning styles is an essential part of training. If the trainer is communicating in one language and the employee is learning in a different language, how much positive work is being accomplished?

If both trainers and employees understood the communication and learning preferences of each other, the process would go much smoother. Everyone would also be more quick to understand what is expected of him or her and assimilate into the work environment more easily. The more relaxed people are, and the more important and understood they feel, the better they'll perform. If something positive is being accomplished in training, even if it's simply getting along better, employees will look upon future training, and their trainers, more favorably.

Now on to factors #2 and #3: they won't exist if factor #1 is taken care of properly.

This discussion is, obviously, very brief. If you are interested in learning more about communication and/or learning styles, a huge assortment of resources is available on the Internet and your local personnel office likely has others, as well.