

My Philosophy of Adult Learning

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### **My Philosophy of Adult Learning**

“Get to Steppin’” or “Just Do It” or “Be Active” – These are all mantras that I’ve been using toward my Personal Journey. Back in August, 2012, I started on what I am now calling my Personal Journey. After turning 41, I realized many things about my life needed to change. To start with, my education became a target. I wanted to become better educationally, more than just my Bachelor’s Degree. So, I started back to school, working toward my Master’s Degree. Completing the degree in Adult Learning and Development is where I decided I needed to be. Teaching adults in high technology software since 1996, I finally realized this is where I needed to be. I have been blessed for a third time to be able to develop and teach adults in technology software; this time in the Manufacturing Industry.

I have always believed that adults were self-directed in their learning. Ever since learning to program software back in 1997, I knew that if an adult needed to learn something new, whether it is for personal or professional gain, they needed to take the initiative to learn that topic. Personally, I have been learning more and more about baking. I’ve watched food shows on Food Network; read magazines and books; and have even been to cake decorating classes. Plus, practice in the subjects I wanted to become more fluent with helped me get to where I am today with baking.

The company that I currently work for is Ridge Tool Company, a subsidiary company to Emerson Electric. Within this company, my job title is PLM (Product Life Management) Coordinator. In this position, I am the gatekeeper of all the data/documentation on all of the products we have 1. Build (or built in the past) internally or 2. Buy (or bought in the past) from external vendors and put the RIDGID brand name on the tool. The data management is controlled through the use of six plus different technologies. While working with all departments

who are in the process of the design, development, and launching of the products, I develop all of the training and teach the correct use of these technology systems. Prior to January, 2012, the company had haphazard training coordination. Because of my past experiences teaching technology, I became the best candidate, and was already teaching the technology prior to transferring to the Product Engineering Department, working as an Administrative Assistant in the Marketing Department. Now, I am working to build a correct curriculum, developing new training topics daily where 50% of my overall job time is devoted to developing and teaching. I train individuals from all over the globe, from Shanghai, China; Cluj, Romania; and Pune, India. I also train all levels of individuals from the college intern to the Vice President. I also train individuals in ALL of the different departments within the company. The training portion of my job can be quite challenging.

The topics that are being trained deal completely around the technology systems used in a Manufacturing organization. The software includes: Siemens Teamcenter, Solid Edge, BPCS (AS/400 System), JDEdwards, Microsoft Access, and various Web-based, in-house customer relationship management tools. There are multiple platforms for training including instructor-led for the individuals located at the headquarters in Elyria, Ohio. For others, the use of Microsoft's Live Meeting, coupled with printed manuals for reference. The printed manuals are used for reference only and not used directly within any instructor-led training class. They can be used by the participants at a later time to recreate the training they learned. Video conference, audio conference, instant messenger, and email are all other ways of communicating training to questioners. Future tools for additional training include video-based training where the individuals can watch the training through online videos. Also, the use of education technology,

by developing other portals, like Microsoft SharePoint becomes important in presenting the documentation.

### **My Personal Philosophy**

When an adult takes the initiative to learn something new, whether they are required to learn this topic for work or personal knowledge gain, this initiative is called Self-Directed Learning. All adults learn new things every day, whether they believe they are learning new topics or not. Unlike with a child whose mind isn't ready to be independent in their learning tasks, adults often have to use independence and initiative in learning. For most adults, they do not believe they are learning if they are not in a formal setting. Perception is the key to understanding learning.

“Andragogy focuses on the adult learner and his or her life situation” (Merriam, Caffarella, Baumgartner, 2007, p. 83) whereas “Pedagogy refers to the teaching of children where the teacher is the focal point” (Peterson, 2012). Without Self-Directed Learning in an adult, most adults would not be able to function. Adults need to become independent to compete and sustain their life in the adult world. What exactly is Self-Directed Learning?

Being in the working world many years now, many of the topics that I have needed to learn for my job have come through taking initiative. Whether that training came from reading a book, watching a video on the Internet, or taking classes formally and informally, I have always been the one who promoted my professional development and requested my learning opportunities. For many, including me, learning, often called professional development, is a means to gain more knowledge in employment-related topics that will help in promotions. At the same time, as an adult, I am not instructed by anyone that I need to learn a specific topic by a specific date. If I did, this type of learning would be considered Pedagogy, where a teacher tells

me what I need to learn and when. On the opposite end of the spectrum to Pedagogy lies Andragogy and Self-Directed Learning. Both of these go hand-in-hand. Andragogy is the theory of how adults learn. Self-Directed Learning is “a process in which students take the initiative to diagnose their learning needs, formulate learning goals, identify resources for learning, select and implement learning strategies, and evaluate learning outcomes. The role of the instructor shifts from being the 'sage on the stage' to the 'guide on the side' in a self-directed learning environment” (The Northeast Texas Network Consortium Coordinating Office, 2002).

There are three goals of Self-Directed Learning. They are: 1. Educators help adults to carry out education plans, whether the individual is in a formal learning program or learning on their own, to plan, carry out, and evaluate that learning; 2. Adults need to critically reflect and understand the reasons for their learning needs, wants, and interests; and 3. Enhance an individual’s ability to become more self-directed in learning more (Merriam, Caffarella, Baumgartner, 2007, p. 107-108). With these goals, individuals who take the initiative to become more knowledgeable in any topic tend to follow these goals.

Personally, I have used the goals first in returning to college to earn my Bachelor’s Degree and now to complete my Master’s Degree. By working with my employer through my supervisor, we discussed the need the company had of having someone trained with this level of knowledge to train others. Our company has a tuition reimbursement program. With the documentation submitted, I was asked by my supervisor to give a descriptive narrative why I felt my proposed education would benefit the company. In the position that I obtained at the beginning of 2012, not only am I completing the daily tasks of my required job, but I am also taking 50% of my time to develop and train others on our technology systems. The documentation was written in such a way that my supervisor and Vice President realized the

need and how I was filling that need. By taking the initiative, I was able to prove to my superiors the importance of this education.

Working with the advisor at the university, I have been able to be guided in carrying out the plan to earn my degree. What classes do I attend? What are the best classes for my ultimate goals for my employment? I am also able to evaluate that the learning I have been completing immediately impacts my ability to perform my job better. I have been able to bring examples of my classroom learning to work, using the ideas and theories immediately. At the same time, as I am currently training adults, I am able to use the training that has already been developed as live case studies in my classes.

As I was promoted at work, I always knew the education path I wished to complete. I have been able to reflect, while researching the correct education path to reach the goal. By reflecting the goals, I was able to determine that there are many other learning opportunities once I complete my degree. Where do I want to go next? What other learning will I be required to complete for my next goal? Is there any other learning required at this time? All of these questions allow me to further become a Self-Directed Learner.

### **Insights or Questions**

This project taught me that I still have much to learn about being the best adult educator that I can be. Being in the classes now allows me to take concrete class assignments and work them into my training development immediately at my job. I have already realized that my goals are not what others' goals are who are also completing the same program. At the same time, I am able to use the training that I am developing for my company as case studies in my classes. The process is a win-win situation for both my degree and my job.

I have also realized in my job that the individuals who are responsible for the development and launching of the product offerings of this company depend on me to guide them to the best possible approaches when using the technology systems. I continue to learn about the technology systems and processes used in the life cycle of the manufacturing products. Prior to accepting this position, I had no knowledge of the Manufacturing Industry. Today, after learning all that I know, I cannot look at a product catalog from any company without realizing there's some sort of process in how a specific product's catalog number was created. Everything has a process. When the process is foreign to me, or a new process needs to be created, the ability to team with the correct individuals to develop the process and subsequent documentation becomes important. When my co-workers ask me questions about topics that have not been documented and trained, the query becomes a new learning opportunity not only for the requestor but for me where I research the topic, develop needed training topics, and train the topic.

This class has helped me to also realize that as we become a truly global company, there are changes in the way I need develop and train our technology systems to a global company. With the individuals located not only in Elyria, Ohio, but other locations across the United States, AND locations in other countries, the process of developing the training changes. How that training is delivered also changes based on the location of the individuals. Do I run Microsoft Live Meeting and a phone conference for the engineers in India? What time of day do I need to schedule for training due to the time zone differences between Elyria and China? These types of questions need to be addressed, as the primary adult learning developer and trainer.

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