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A Public Service Column for Members: **A Look At Wellness**

Learning How People Learn

We learn every day. We learn about ourselves. We learn about news and current events. We learn stuff just to learn it. We also teach everyday. This is especially true for training staff, Field Training Officers and parents. By learning about how people learn, we can be more effective educators and students. First, we will examine how people learn. Second, we will discuss how the classroom is giving way to online learning and, finally, I will provide suggestions about how to meet each student's needs.

Learning styles can be conceptualized along five continuums:

- Environmental (The environment you need to learn best)
- Active/Reflective (When you process information)
- Auditory/hearing, visual/seeing, or kinesthetic/doing (methods for receiving information most effectively)
- Sequential or Global (How you conceptualize information)
- Sensing vs. Intuitive (What you pay attention to)

Understanding where you fit in each of these areas will help you design your learning environment. Let's face it, if you are uncomfortable, you cannot learn. In the classroom, keep the temperature around 72 degrees, use as much natural light as possible, have comfortable seating, provide sufficient stretch breaks, and group people by shift. People with less than 12 hours since their shift ended are going to be far less productive. (Mountain Dew and Snickers only makes them *think* they are awake.)

Now that you are comfortable, how do you best take in information. Despite my six-year old's insistence, you cannot learn by osmosis. Kinesthetic learners have to take the information and do something with it, "Let's try it out and see how it works" or "How would this apply to..." Auditory learners are much easier as they thrive in the typical lecture course. For them working in groups helps them gain an understanding of material by hearing classmates' explanations. Visual learners need to see it. Provide charts, diagrams, powerpoints, timelines and videos.

Okay, you have the information in your short-term memory, how and when do you process it? Yes, to qualify as learning, you actually have to remember it for more than 30 minutes. Active and reflective learning relates to when you process information. Reflective learners prefer to think about it quietly first. Active learners tend to like group work and need to talk through their thought process. Allow students time every 15-30 minutes to either think independently or pair up with a neighbor and talk about the material. Hmmm, use visual aids, activities and lecture in a comfortable environment... pretty standard stuff.

Ahhh, but now it gets tricky. As teachers, we need students to get the big picture, but also understand the underlying principles. Intuitive learners tend to see the big picture, but may miss important details. Sensing learners rely too much on memorization and details and do not concentrate enough on understanding the general concept (big picture). Cover all important material, relate it to the real world and provide worksheets or other concrete learning methods to help sensing students grasp the basic concepts. Intuitive learners will prefer to use more abstract case studies, scenarios and activities. I often give intuitors a checklist of the basic principles they need to cover in their activity. This ensures they get the details, but gives them more creative freedom.

Finally, the way you think about information is either sequential or global. Global learners are concerned with the whole meaning and the end results. They need to start with an overview of the big picture before they deal with details and facts. People who prefer sequential style of learning prefer to learn one detail at a time in a meaningful sequence. Once they know all the parts, they put them together and comprehend the big picture. Both of these types benefit from an outline of the material. Global learners will also appreciate a brief overview at the beginning. I am a very global learner. When I write grants, I start with the end product and work

backwards. For example: Jim Bob, Inc. is going to give me \$250,000 for a delinquency prevention project. I figure out what I envision doing with the money then work backwards to figure out all the details like the budget and particular geographic regions I am targeting. A sequential person would start with the budget, figure out personnel then decide what the program would look like.

That is all well and good, but how do these principles apply in the new virtual classroom? Overall, e-learning is very useful for conveying information and teaching academic skills. Although, it is not appropriate for teaching complex or interactive skills. Do you really want your heart surgeon getting his degree online? The key to success is how it is presented. The following is a summary of points I learned when I started teaching professional development classes online. I hope it will help you make your virtual trainings enjoyable for everyone.

1. Constantly relate the information to concepts your students already know or to the real world.
2. Ask questions in the presentation and require students to respond
3. Auditory learners need to hear it. Narrated PowerPoints, mp3's
4. Kinesthetic learners need to manipulate or work with it (Create an informational brochure or presentation, design questions for a Jeopardy game etc.)
5. Visual learners need to read it. Provide pictures, graphs, charts and color coding as much as possible.
6. Reflective learners like to work alone and have time to mull things over. Research papers, essay questions, forum posts are good activities.
7. Active learners like to work in groups and talk things out. The e-learning platform I use has a chatroom module which allows people to discuss the questions in real-time and save the transcript from their discussion which is later posted for grading. (It sounds more complicated than it is.)
8. Global learners need to see the big picture. Start each course by providing an overview of what you are going to teach, why it is important, and how it relates to the real world.
9. Sequential learners like order and, well, sequence. Provide an outline. They will use it like an instruction manual, step-by-step, and global learners will use it to try to figure out how all those little steps fit into the big picture.
10. Intuitive learners like to innovate and be creative. Give them scenarios, case studies or other ways to apply the information and consider all of the possibilities.
11. Sensing learners like plug and chug. Provide worksheets and concrete activities that relate the material to the real-world.

When people hear they are going to start doing training on the computer, the reaction is usually very polarized. Some love it. Some hate it. Many of the people who hate it remember the old-school e-learning environment of rote memorization and cumbersome computer programs. With a good course developer to "bring to life" the content provided by the experts, many employees really enjoy the new e-learning programs. 🟦

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PBA wishes to express appreciation to Dr. Snipes for contributing this helpful column for the benefit of our members.



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