

Have You Graduated from “Training” to “Self-Development”?

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Life is a continuous growth process. If you're not growing, you're dying. Change in today's world is lurking around every corner; to be successful, you've got to plan for it and adapt to it. So, for a few moments, sit back and think about your approach to developing enhanced skills.

Think back to the beginning of your career. In your first job, you probably attended a variety of training sessions. Somebody more experienced than you, perhaps your boss, scheduled you to attend organized classes. In addition, you probably received lots of on-the-job training. Again, somebody more experienced than you showed you what you needed to know and do to successfully meet the expectations of the people who hired you.

Maybe you wished you had some additional training in areas where training wasn't provided. You found you had to learn some things on your own, through trial and error. Many times, however, you weren't quite sure you had learned what you needed to know.

Let's think about "training" for a moment. In most training, whether in a classroom or on-the-job, somebody else is setting the agenda. There are usually some very explicitly defined outcomes associated with transferring knowledge or skill to you.

The timing of the training is usually set to accommodate the availability of the instructor. In the training session itself, the instructor (or perhaps someone else) decides if what you've learned is good enough.

Some training has formal qualification requirements; for example, to perform some jobs, you must achieve above a certain score on a test to qualify for a license. Other training is less formal, but usually somebody has to verify that you've at least met the minimally acceptable requirements.

So here's the new insight I'd like you to consider. A limitation of training is the surprisingly addictive dependence on others. You're dependent on someone (often your boss) to let you know what training exists and what training you need. You're dependent upon the competency of the trainer, both in knowledge of the subject matter and in delivery style. And you're dependent upon somebody to tell you that you've achieved enough mastery to survive!

As you assume more responsibility, who tells you what training is available? Who identifies the subject matter that will make you more effective in the execution of your responsibilities?

Your need for additional growth doesn't stop. But soon after you assume any kind of leadership responsibility, few people can tell you what skills are required to handle the new demands. Who holds you accountable to seek relevant growth? And who rewards your initiative to stretch yourself?

At some time, most growing leaders graduate from "training" to "self-development." You identify the need for further competency. You start thinking about the skill areas you'd like to improve. You research the possible ways in which to acquire growth. You decide the extent of effort you are willing to exercise in generating a plan to obtain the desired improvement.

You determine when you've achieved "good enough" in generating your growth plan. Finally, in executing the plan, you decide the extent to which you actually do what you've said you want to do. You will judge if the progress you make is sufficient to satisfy you and those you serve.

Now, take a step back and look at the bigger picture. Consider your organization's culture. Is self-development valued among the individuals under your authority? Or are the people in your organization dependent upon you or someone else to tell them what they need and how to satisfy that need?

Organized training can be a valuable contribution to the growth of people early in their careers and to individuals who have to learn some technology that's new for your workplace. Have you taken the next step by empowering your team members to take responsibility for their own growth needs?

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