

PERCOLATING BUILDS DEPTH



No matter how hard people try to expand their mental imagery, when people hear the word “leader” they typically imagine a hierarchy and think about a person with some form of legitimate power. In reality, regardless of one’s position, a significant percentage of his or her attempts to lead others target peers and senior associates, proving that leadership isn’t as hierarchical as one might think.

The same is true when people hear the word “learning.” Often, people associate learning with a subject matter expert (SME) in formal control of a classroom (either physical or virtual) in order to impart knowledge. Upon further review, however, it is evident that there are numerous ways people learn. For instance, have you ever gotten in your car (even for a short drive across town) and “unplugged” (i.e., eliminated all sources of outside distraction)? It’s amazing where your mind can go when it’s not distracted. You may start thinking about people you sincerely appreciate but haven’t seen or spoken to in a while, or things you have been meaning to take care of but, for whatever reason, haven’t, or even things you need to investigate more closely. By the time you get where you are going, you have generated a prioritized list of actions you need to take.

An expanded version of that same drill can yield countless unforeseen benefits when you have a couple other people driving with you (perhaps on a little bit longer of a trip). When you limit external competing responses by

unplugging, the quality of your time together can be greatly enhanced. You may remember things that have long been forgotten, or learn things about your passengers you never would have known. If traffic cooperates, the time flies and, at minimum, the depth of your understanding about each other has increased dramatically.


Believe it or not, activities like these used to be key components of formalized learning in leadership training (albeit, not the driving part). A facilitator would introduce a concept, ask learners to thoughtfully consider it in the context of their life experiences, and then share those thoughts with peer learners before engaging in a large group discussion where everyone had informal access to what everyone else was thinking. It was a highly collaborative sequence that allowed whatever was being discussed to percolate. Almost invariably, that percolation resulted in an increased depth of understanding.

So, where did all this percolating in formalized leadership learning go? Long story short, it turns out it’s much easier to quantify the cost savings of making a three-day program a two- or one-day program than it is to demonstrate the tangible pull-through or return on investment (ROI) of that three-day program. In general, what wound up getting cut to deliver that reduced seat-time? Introspective reflection. Small group discussions. Large group discussions. Pretty much anything that remotely resembled intellectual percolating. What suffered (or, at a

minimum, became more challenging to demonstrate)? Training transfer. Pull-through. Behavior change.

But guess what’s making a huge comeback? Percolation! With ever-increasing regularity, the leadership training event is being extended to bring self-directed and community-based learning activities back into the mix. Learners can be paired and scheduled post-event to engage in an ongoing series of virtual, peer-driven, real-world application activities. Those activities can culminate with virtual or live presentations on lessons learned, behaviors altered and results achieved.

PERCOLATION IS MAKING A HUGE COMEBACK IN LEADERSHIP TRAINING.

Learning, like leadership, is so much more than simply receiving and implementing a message from someone with formal authority. It’s a function of creating the time and opportunity to reflect on and discuss that message in a manner that yields discernible progress. 

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