

## Tying Adult Learning to Brain Research ©copyright by Robert (Bob) W. Lucas

Since the first part of this year I have been conducting a lot of workshops and presentations on creative training techniques and brain-based learning for adults.

Frequently attendees ask questions related to adult learning and what strategies or techniques work best to help their participants better gain, retain, recall and use what they experience. Invariably, the answer comes back to how the type of learning environment you set for your participants.

For decades, neuroscientists, psychologists, and cognitive scientists have explored the intricacies of the human brain in an attempt to learn what happens when various stimuli is introduced into a learner's environment. Since many elements can impact brain functioning and stimulate brain neurons it is sometimes easier to look at some things that researchers have found related to adult learners.

Here are four things to know about adult learners that might assist you when you are designing and delivering content for your participants:

**#1 Adults want to know how what they learn will help them personally and/or in the workplace.** Presenting theory will not work with today's adult learners. Because information is so readily available in today's world and training time is often limited, adult learners want to quickly understand what they will gain from attendance at your session and how they will be able to apply it. If you cannot explain or demonstrate how they will immediately be able to use information, strategies and techniques, you are likely to lose their interest.

**#2 Adults tend to self-sufficient.** Typically, you will encounter participants who come to the learning event with a wide array of experience, knowledge, and competencies. As a result, they do not want to be told what, when and how they will learn. Instead, they want information shared and have an opportunity to be actively engaged in the process and experience the learning on individual levels.

**#3 Adults want to feel ownership of the learning process.** To accomplish this, it is good to build in opportunities where they can mold the approach to learning in their own way. As you design your sessions, address the needs of visual, auditory and kinesthetic learners by adding activities in which learners experience "ah ha" moments about content as they jointly explore the who, what, when, how and why of information they are receiving.

**#4 Adults want to have an enjoyable learning experience.** Life is stressful enough without having to sit through some painful learning experience in which rote memory or tedious activities are involved. During the learning process, you have to build in interesting, interactive and sensory-oriented strategies and techniques (e.g. music, magic, games, puzzles and other FUN elements). These help your learners' brains

release dopamine, which stimulates the pre-frontal cortex to aid attention and memory, and endorphins, which come from laughter and pleasurable experiences and help participants feel good about their learning.

Ultimately, your goal should be to treat adult learners as partners in the learning process and allow them ample opportunity to become fully engaged throughout the event.

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