

## Why experiential learning is so important in business

by [Julie Winkle Giulioni](#) | Posted June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013 | [Learning](#)



While organizations routinely report subscribing to the 70/20/10 learning model, very few actually practice it. “Classes” are too frequently the default development strategy, when experiences can be more cost effective, tailored, and scalable.

Poll ten organizations and you’ll likely find that nine subscribe to the 70/20/10 learning model. This approach, developed by the Center for Creative Leadership and supported by US Bureau of Labor Statistics, suggests that people learn about 70% of their jobs informally through experience, 20% through relationships, and 10% through formal training methods.

Well, I subscribe to Women’s Health Magazine, but I’m still not in the kind of shape I’d like to be. Do you know why? Because there’s a big difference between *subscribing* to something and actually practicing it.

### The numbers don’t add up

Earlier this year, CLO Magazine published the results of the [2012 Chief Learning Officer Business Intelligence Board survey](#) which support this subscription/practice gap. It reports that more than 80% of learning continues to be instructor-led, offered in a formal or structured setting (a far-cry from the 10% suggested in the extensively *subscribed-to* model).

Perhaps it’s time for those of us in the learning community to put our intentions and subscriptions into practice... to “get off our classes” and get serious about experience-based learning. The business case is obvious since experience-based learning is:

- Cost effective
- Employee-driven, enhancing buy-in while shifting the burden from time-starved leaders
- Efficient, building individual capacity while accomplishing real work that needs to get done

### Engineer experiences

Engineering experiences as a primary [training and development strategy](#) is a targeted, scalable, results-focused learning model that fits well into the cadence of today’s workplace. But, to make it happen, employees and leaders must be able and willing to take three key steps together.

## 1. Clarify development needs

All training should be based on agreed-upon priorities; but experience-based learning demands it. This means that leaders and employees engage in routine, open conversations about career goals, aspirations, performance, and confidence levels. Knowing [what must be learned and why](#) is the basis for meaningful development.

## 2. Identify experiences or activities

With a clear understanding of the competency, capability, or need to be addressed, employees and leaders can collaborate to determine the specific activities or experiences that will deliver that learning.

In many organizations, these are referred to as enrichment or stretch assignments... but they only count as development if they enrich or stretch the employee in an agreed-upon and defined way. Too frequently the focus is fuzzy and employees find themselves engaged in low-value busy work. Instead ensure an unambiguous link between the need and the experience. For example:

Activity for activity's sake means nothing. Specific experiences develop specific abilities.

<b>Does the employee...</b>	<b>Consider having him/her...</b>
Need to develop financial savvy?	Take responsibility for the department's budget management for a quarter
Aspire to a senior leadership role?	Join a non-profit board or take on a high-profile volunteer role that involves complex relationships and ambitious goals
Want to grow into a project management role?	Write or report on a current project's deliverables
Need to expand his/her understanding of the marketplace?	Conduct a competitor analysis
Want to improve influencing skills?	Build, test, and present the business case for a new product, additional resources, or a process change

## 3. Debrief the learning

Completing the experience is only part of what's required. When employees and leaders take the time to step back, reflect, internalize, and consciously decide how to put new insights, skills, and abilities to work... that's where the payoff of the experience — and real learning — occurs.

## Trainers (still) needed

So, what does it mean for training professionals if an organization decides to commit greater resources to experience-based learning? Do they become irrelevant?

Absolutely not. The role remains vitally important... and its emphasis shifts.

<http://www.halogensoftware.com/blog/why-experiential-learning-is-so-important-in-business>

Executing the steps necessary to successfully engineer development experiences demands enhanced skills — for both managers and employees alike. They must be able to engage in meaningful conversation, translate desired direction into specific needs, set experiences (and themselves) up for success, and extract lessons learned from the successes and challenges encountered.

And no one is better prepared to help build this capacity in others than the trainers in the organization.

So, perhaps it's time to trade in our subscriptions to 70/20/10 and begin putting experience-based learning into practice. It's just a matter of [shifting focus](#), engaging leaders and employees differently; and getting off our classes.