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...Build The People, Build The Business...,' Can you really learn after you turn 40?

By Dr. Lillie Ann Piosalan

In last month's KALA, a CEO asked me for advice:

"I have a challenge with one of my senior managers. She is a hard worker and loyal employee. She has been comfortable with manual tracking for the past 20 years. We try to get her to use updated technology to be more efficient but she just cannot learn. Can you really teach a senior employee "new tricks"?"

My response:

You cannot expect an employee who has been doing a task for 20 years to sit in a computer class and transform into a computer whiz in the next 30 days!

Adults can "learn" if they want to; the key is to ensure new information and/or procedures are properly and effectively introduced. If an adult does not want to learn, the information being introduced in training will be discarded. Imagine fresh

breeze that wants to enter a room but the window is closed; of course, there will be no ventilation in the room. If the employee "wants" to learn, he/she will allow the fresh breeze to enter the room by opening the window.

Leaders should consider the following "LEARNING LAWS" before providing training opportunities and programs for employees:

Law of Readiness

Adults are "ready" to learn when they have an interest or if you can create an interest or need. It is imperative to have an effective instructor or trainer make the learning fun and interesting. If the employee is bored of rewriting figures in the "ledgers" or is unable to complete the work load in a timely manner, she will be open to learning about an automated system.

Law of Exercise

Adults learn faster when new knowledge is applied and repeated (i.e., a habit forms quickly with an average of 35 repetitions). Don't allow yourself or employees to ignore repetitive use of new knowledge to form good habits. If the employee learns to make corrective adjustments when using the computer for the same task for 35 days, she will be successful in using an automated system instead a manual one.

Law of Effect

Adults who are ready to learn will apply new knowledge which will then result in positive satisfaction (i.e., learning is weakened when associated with a feeling of failure). If the employee is learning to input a "ledger" and mistakenly hits the "no" button often to save the information, she probably would refuse to use the computer again for a while!

Law of Disuse

Skills or knowledge not used or practiced will be largely forgotten if your brain believes it is not important enough to keep in long-term memory.

The employee may sit in a computer class but if she does not try to apply what she learned in her daily work routine, the new found knowledge will be lost.

Law of Intensity

The more vivid, dramatic, emotional or exciting a learning experience or teachable moment, the more likely it will be remembered. The employee needs an instructor or trainer who is effective or dramatic to make the learning experiences memorable and successful. If an employee reads a computer training manual or learns on-line or from a CD, about 10% of the new knowledge will be retained because only the visual sense is being stimulated. On the other hand, if an effective trainer utilizes multi-sensory learning opportunities, 90% of the new knowledge will be retained. If an employee practices new knowledge by verbally repeating new information while doing a task, and a trainer/supervisor/manager coaches as a follow up and reinforcement, an employee over the age of 40 can learn.

Dr. Lillie Ann Piosalan, Organizational Development Consultant and Motivational Speaker for Piosalan & Associates, shares her expertise relating to Human Resources Management and Human Resources Development. Please visit Piosalan & Associates' website at www.piosalan.com for more information or contact Lillie at Lillie@Piosalan.com.