

Brief Overview of book to be published by Pfeiffer. Very much a work in progress.

Informal Learning

A Fieldbook for Free-Range Learners and Frustrated Training Directors

Invitation

Come with me. I will show you how to prosper at work and lead a happier life.

Were it possible to take a magic pill and awaken knowing these secrets, I'd be a wealthy former pharmacist sipping margaritas on the beach of my private island. Sad to say for both of us, there are no magic pills. Gaining prosperity and happiness take effort. At least it's going to be easier than what you're accustomed to.

This morning I grabbed a few books from the shelf and wandered out to the small deck behind my house in Berkeley. Two young deer eyed me cautiously from the redwoods 30' down the hill.

Robert Mager wrote *What Every Manager Should Know About Training* a dozen years ago. I still think of this as Mager's **new** book, having cut my teeth on "The Mager Sixpack" in the mid-70s. Bob is great at asking questions. "Is it a training problem?" Training is usually the most expensive (and frequently inappropriate) way to solve a performance problem. And that's what it's all about: **Performance**.

I've been repeating this so long, I thought I'd made it up. Training is but a means to an end. Results are the only thing that counts. This book is going to lead you on an exploration of informal learning but that, too, is but a stepping stone to leading a more fulfilling life.

Roger Schank wrote *Virtual Learning* in 1997. Roger's a former professor at Stanford, Yale, and Northwestern. He's author of a dozen books, a serial entrepreneur and gourmet chef who most recently signed on as Chief Learning Officer of Trump University. Roger's off-the-scale brilliance is marred only by his delusion that he's a movie star. In *Virtual Learning*, he wrote, "Everything that's wrong with training can be stated in four words: 'It's just like school.'"

Schools are an awful way to learn. Don't leave just yet. You went to school; I went to school; we have all drunk the KoolAid. Most of us have invested nearly twenty years in school. It's not pleasant to reflect on how little we've retained. After all that work, it's tough to accept that grades mean absolutely nothing in the real world. So don't get uptight. We'll come back to this theme. For now, appreciate that we're not going to expect much from courses, teachers, lectures, and classrooms. Instead, we'll do what comes naturally. And have a good time.

Informal Learning

Informal learning is how you learned most of what you know. No one takes attendance, for there are no classes. No one assigns grades, for success in life is its measure of effectiveness. No one graduates, because learning never ends. You learn informally through trial-and-error, calling the help line, asking a neighbor, traveling to a new place, reading a magazine, conversing with others, joining a group, composing a story, correcting a mistake, burning you finger on a hot stove, awakening with an inspiration, raising a child, visiting a museum, or pursuing what you find interesting.

Along the way, I'll tell a number of stories. Why? Because you can learn from stories. They're as close as a book can come to conversation. You don't get to talk back or ask questions, but you will be actively engaged in telling yourself the stories you want to hear. "I liked the novel better than the movie because the colors were more vivid." Visualize the stories anyway you wish.

Model

Learning in the network era requires a new model. I'll lay out the model and give examples of applying it to the augmented learner, the augmented network, and the augmented environment. Hint: it's all about connections.

Informal Learning in the Organization

Since people learn their jobs informally, it's foolish for a company to leave informal learning to chance. I'll share stories about how some organizations are leveraging informal learning to build a more adaptable workforce, strengthen relationships with customers, reduce operational inefficiencies, and connect strategy to execution. We'll talk of knowledge-sharing, social networks, communities of practice, workflow learning, non-linear thinking, collaboration, demolishing

cubicles, and Friday-afternoon beer busts. I expect to present these as extended stories about The Grove Consultants, Cisco, O'Reilly, Steelcase, Pfizer, Booz Allen, Appreciative Inquiry, and others.

Sample corporate story-chapters:

1. Being There. Why presence is key.
2. Workflow Learning. Merge learning and work.
3. Collaboration. Expertise location. Presence awareness. IBM and IM.
4. The knowledge-creating environment
5. The Museum and the Library: in-house.
6. Knowledge sharing, Plogs. Bottom-up KM.
7. Meta-learning. Learning to learn. Celebrating corrections. Reflection.
8. Establishing a learning culture.
9. Alumni (ex-employees)

Informal Learning Cheatsheets for the Individual

Because learning is a key to success and happiness, I am going to give you sixty ways to learn better, faster, cheaper, and more enjoyably. You're invited to cherry-pick the shortcuts, hints, models, and stories that resonate with what you're trying to accomplish. With a topic like informal learning, I'm certainly not expecting you to read every page and learn every lesson. Please take what you want and move on. From this point forward, you are responsible for your own learning. Some of these "learning hacks" will take a paragraph (for example, parking affirmations or sleeping on it); others will take several pages (for example, keeping your journal, finding a mentor).

Sample learning hacks for individuals:

1. Know thyself
2. Just ask. And contra.
3. Personal instructional design.
4. Recruit your contacts. Weak ties. Expertise.
5. You are what you read
6. Learn to learn
7. Life is random/complexity.
8. Change the things you can; accept the things you can't.
9. Optimism, expect results, believe in change, homeostasis

10. Begin with a goal in mind
11. Learning conversations
12. Get out of comfort zone

Since many people are unfamiliar with instructional design, I also intend to highlight some of ISD's good memes that apply to informal situations, e.g. what makes a good learning environment, reinforcement, assessment, and the importance of objectives.

Payback

A major reason individuals and organizations overlook Informal Learning is that no one ever totes up its benefits. I intend to give a corporate "what's-in-it-for-me" to conclude each chapter. This will entail intangibles, time horizons, value flows, and probabilities. (When a topic gets too big for its britches, I will let it slip over to the web for continuation.)

Graphics

Personally, I can't abide solid blocks of text, page after page. I hope to have a graphic or two to illustrate every major concept.

Glossary

Concepts and opinions as well as definitions.

Keeping up

This book won't hit the shelves for sixteen months. Blogs, podcasts, RSS, remix, and so forth will have progressed far beyond what we know today. A web supplement will provide the latest scoop.

Since stories are the best way to get a message across, I plan to pepper my narrative with stories from personal experience. (I have twenty years of personal journals to draw from.)

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