



# Adult learning: The key to all employee development

**Small Biz Strategies**  
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Staff development is closely associated to the growth of a business. This is particularly true in small businesses where each employee plays an essential role in the success of the business.

Training and educating employees is no longer a “nice to do” within the company but a “must do” if an organization desires to remain competitive in today’s ever-changing market place. Companies that take a sincere interest in enhancing their employee’s ability to perform stand a better chance of making it through hard economic times than those who strictly focus on hitting the bottom line. The truth of the matter is that if you want to take care of the bot-

tom line, take care of the people that are taking care of the bottom line. A simple thought, but hard to execute.

It is a clear fact that well-informed, proficient and capable employees directly impact a company’s ability to please customer expectations, resolve problems and issues, and adjust to changing market conditions.

Most employees find learning new skills and taking on new challenges exciting as well as gratifying. Contented employees tend to possess a strong self-image, notable self-esteem, a positive outlook, work harder and stay with their employers longer. However, the learning process is not the same for everyone. Educating an intergenerational workforce is not for the faint of heart. For example, management’s strategy for connecting with Generation –X might include providing frequent training, recognizing accomplishments, providing challenges, clearly communicating expectations and allowing flexible schedules. For Generation –Y: Assign mentors, challenge with projects, set reasonable and clear workplace goals, involve in community service and give them the “Why” before they ask. And for Boomers: Utilize their interpersonal

skills, allow for their opinion to be shared, provide project timelines and be honest and sincere in all dealings.

There are three critical questions management must ask themselves prior to implementing any training or educational program:

- 1) What is the knowledge that my staff will gain for our time together?
- 2) What are the skills that they will be able to perform upon completion of the program?
- 3) What are the behaviors that they will exhibit once they return to the workplace?

Having an understanding behind the concepts of adult learning will assist any manager in the development of their workforce. Learning can be defined formally as the act, progression or experience of gaining new understanding or skills. In contrast, memory can define the capacity of storing, retrieving and acting on that knowledge.

The list below will introduce you to the most significant things we know about how adults learn; however, this list is not all-inclusive. Begin to apply the concepts to all company training programs and you will be delighted with the end results of your efforts.

- People learn more rapidly and retain more when there is a strong **ASPIRATION** to learn.
- A learning activity must **CHALLENGE** in order to inspire the learner.
- Learning something new is easier when one can **BUILD** upon something already known.
- Better learning results occur when one can **APPLY** what they have learned (best to use practical examples).
- People like learning things in a **LOGICAL** order.
- The more **SENSES** involved in the learning experience the more effective the learning.
- **FIRST LEARNING IMPRESSIONS** are the most lasting (what one learns first, one learns best: either positive or negative).
- Learning takes place by **DOING**.
- **EMOTIONS & ATTITUDES** are strong incentives either for or against learning.

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