

Engaging Adult Learners

Here are four key principles that can be used to engage adult learners in the learning process.

Readiness: “Focus on Learners’ needs.”

Adults are ready to learn when they open their minds to it. Sometimes, they may need a little encouraging! How do we do that? By offering information that helps them solve a problem, avoid a problem, provides an opportunity or provides status and professional or personal growth. As with all students, we need to watch for “the teachable moment.”

What is the motivation to learn for adults? It may be

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| 1) economic (learn to earn) | 6) a mandate |
| 2) they’re interested in the topic | 7) fear |
| 3) to prove something | 8) enjoyment |
| 4) for status | 9) social |
| 5) for personal fulfillment | 10) practical |

Experience: “Speak their language and allow them to contribute.”

Do the best that you can to determine the level of experience of your learners. You’ll lose them if you go over their heads and you may insult them if you treat them as if they don’t know anything. Remember that adults have a wealth of experience to draw upon and contribute to the learning process.

Autonomy: “Learn by doing.”

Adults learn best if they can take charge of their learning. They like to participate and contribute. They require respect, even when they make mistakes. Create opportunities for learners to participate.

Action: “Use it or lose it.”

Adults want to apply what they learn as soon as possible. Help them see how they can use what they learn, and provide opportunities for them to practice new learning. If the information is only used occasionally, think of ways to create refresher opportunities.

Adapted from: Stolovitch, Harold and Keeps, Erica J., (2002). **Telling Ain’t Training.** Virginia: American Society for Training and Development.