

TURN OF EVENTS



“Space” is no longer a barrier for learning and development (L&D) departments as they develop and implement creative solutions designed to meet the needs of remote and highly distributed workforces. So, perhaps the new frontier is “time” – or, more accurately stated, perhaps the new frontier involves confronting our long-held temporally-ordered approach to learning.

Temporal order refers to the arrangement of events over time. It also refers to the way many training programs are designed to anchor learning to a central event. This creates a “before, during and after” sequence with some introductory information as the before, the main event as the during, and some follow-up and reinforcement as the after. It’s a comfortable learning “three-step” process that’s played out for decades in organizations.

The challenge with temporally ordering learning is that it creates an artificial and linear approach that doesn’t accommodate the cadence of the workplace, which requires more fluid, flexible and non-sequential support; fails to optimize the natural human learning process; and contributes to a “check-the-box” mentality because typically completing the main event is prioritized and other activities are relegated to second-class citizen status.

So maybe it’s time to rethink time and how it relates to training. Maybe it’s time to evolve our unconscious mental models to better align with how learning is increasingly occurring in the workplace.

Today, it’s more of a journey or trajectory (with lots of equally valuable stops along the way). It’s a collection of resources or a playlist specially curated “just for me.” Learning is more of a puzzle, mosaic or patchwork quilt in which each of the pieces (learning assets) are required to complete the picture.

Thinking about learning in this less eventful fashion allows for tremendous synergy among instructional elements. Rather than “lesser” resources rotating around the “sun” of the main event, a less linear approach allows elements to reinforce each other in more flexible, unique and learner-centered ways. And this contributes to the long-term adoption of new skills and behaviors.

Lifting our temporally-constrained (before, during and after or main event) thinking allows for many benefits such as enhanced creativity, flexibility, usage and results. The traditional main event model met the needs of a less dynamic workplace when employees might have been able to wait a quarter or longer to attend a course. But today’s workers can rarely afford that kind of lag. Allowing for a less sequential approach to learning ensures that skills development can keep pace with the speed of business.

Want to break through the temporal or event-focused barrier? Try these three steps.

1. Adopt an egalitarian outlook. Look at each element or asset with fresh eyes. Challenge yourself to think differently about those main events

that have historically carried more weight. Elevate each element all to the same level. You can even make it a game by writing each learning asset or component on its own index card, shuffle them up, and lay them out in different configurations to shake up your traditional thinking.

CHANGING OUR WORDS CAN CHANGE OUR MINDSET.

2. Watch your language. Changing our words can change our mindset. So, eliminate “before, during and after” from your lexicon. It only reinforces that the main event is the main event. Instead, begin talking about “suites of resources” or “complementary content components.”

3. Hold all elements to the same standard. Force previously thought of pre- and post-learning components to work just as hard as the traditional main event. Make sure each is valuable in and of itself. Build in reflection and application planning so every element actively drives learning.

Overcoming our temporal default means recasting learning and de-emphasizing the main event... which could be an eventful transition for L&D and the organizations they serve. ☺

Julie Winkle Giulioni has 25 years of experience working with organizations worldwide to improve performance through learning. Email Julie.