



Accelerated Learning

You will accelerate your personal learning and exponentially increase corporate learning when you teach what you learn to others.

FOR TWO DECADES I HAVE BEEN teaching a simple concept of accelerated personal growth and exponential organizational learning. I address this timeless principle again here and now because I believe that the school of the future will be business. Everyone has to be upgraded in knowledge and skills. We all have to go back to school. The new emphasis on training and education, on upgrading the mindset and skillset of everyone, comes in response to the demands of the global economy. And since this concept represents a better way of doing it, it's very relevant.

This story starts in 1975 when I took a course from Dr. Walter A. Gong, a visiting professor from San Jose State University, on "How to improve your teaching." His basic lesson was simply this: the best way to learn something is to teach it. I was impressed that Dr. Gong practiced this principle daily in his family. Each night at dinner, Dr. Gong asked his sons, Gerrit and Brian, and daughter Marguerite to teach the essence of what they had learned that day in school. And the result? All three children were Rhodes scholars who received their Ph.D.s from Oxford, Stanford, and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy.

Now, most people already know the truth of this principle. It is almost self-evident. Still, it is not used much in business, or even in education. And yet the single most important thing I have learned in the field of training and development is to teach what you learn to others.

Dr. Gong's learning process involved three roles for every learner: 1) capturing or understanding essential information, 2) expanding or applying this knowledge into his own life for his own purposes and values, and 3) teach-

ing others for their benefit and growth. Since growth increases dramatically when people teach what they learn to others, each person must see himself as both learner and teacher in all areas of responsibility and accountability.

When I started applying this simple principle in the mid 1970s, my own learning accelerated dramatically, and my teaching improved. I found ways not only to teach more students but also to reach a much wider audience with greater impact.



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At the University, I started teaching small classes of 20 to 25 students, but ended up teaching from 500 to 1,000 students a semester. And yet in most cases, student scores were higher than ever. This learning process changed the teacher-student ratio from one to 1,000 to one to one. Their scores on standard tests went up. Most of my students actually learned more in a class of 1,000 than in a group of 20 because they were teaching each other one on one.

In recent years, my colleagues and I have also applied this principle in our public seminars, asking people to take from two to ten minutes and teach what they have learned. This short exercise gives participants a sense of the accelerated learning that is possi-

ble, and it makes a big difference in what they learn and apply. Again, you simply learn more when you know you have to teach the material to others.

How to Capture and Expand

Most people have not cultivated the ability to capture content and express the essence of what they learn. Dr. Gong taught how to capture by taking notes under five headings.

1. Purpose: Try to discern the significant purpose of the teacher or presenter. Even if he or she is not organized, you can organize your mind and notes in this way by asking, "What is the purpose?"

2. Main points: What are the main points or central messages, and the means needed to achieve the purposes?

3. Validation: What evidence or examples were presented? How did the person validate his or her points?

4. Application: How can these points be applied to improve other situations?

5. Value: How much value did the teacher put on this learning?

Expansion begins when you start asking, "What is the value or worth of the knowledge and skills to me?" That question separates expansion from capture. I find that the longer people stay in an understanding or capture mode, they tend to understand the material much better. When they start judging the material or the presenter right away, they not only learn less but they also discount the value of the learning.

I also find that people grow faster when they pattern their current performance after their previous best efforts and most significant learning. These "reference examples" may then be used to solve new problems or cope well with new situations. People who learn to capture essential job-related information (and the essence of any communication) experience dramatic professional growth. And when people personalize the knowledge, they experience the benefits of overlapping personal and organizational values, needs, and goals.

Four Advantages

I see four big advantages from applying this principle of teach what you learn.

1. *You simply learn better when you teach.* The main reason that you learn better when you teach is because your paradigm has shifted. When you see yourself as a teacher, you take a far more responsible attitude toward the learning. You are far more motivated to learn when you know you are responsible to teach. You see yourself not only as a listener and learner but also as a teacher and mentor. So, you become a much better learner.

2. *When you teach something you feel good about, you increase the likelihood of living it.* By teaching something, you make a social statement. It makes you accountable along with the people you teach. They now expect you to live it. Teaching creates a kind of social support system, a social expectation, or an implied social contract that you try to live. If you live what you teach, you are much more credible and your teaching is much more inspiring and motivating.

3. *When you teach what you learn, you promote bonding in the relationship.* Every time you have an authentic teaching experience with another person and good comes from it, that good and new learning on the part of both parties actually causes both teacher and learner to become more bonded. People who have been influenced by great teachers tend to feel very close to them. Note how much appreciation and respect they give their teachers. Also note how the teacher reciprocates when a student really cares about the material. There is a deepened relationship in teaching that bonds people.

4. *When you teach something that you are learning, it lubricates the change and growth process for yourself.* It makes change legitimate. You see yourself (and others see you) in a new light; and when you begin to see yourself in a new light, you experience more and faster growth. For example, if you try to teach me something before you have a personal learning experience with it, I might say, "What's going on? Is something wrong?" But if you teach me something that you recently learned and experienced, I will be more open to both the message and the messenger. I might also share something relevant with you that I learned. Such shared learning makes change legitimate on the part of both the teacher and student. The student will allow the

teacher to change and grow because the teacher is sharing what the teacher has learned.

Of course, you need to recognize that there's a time to teach. With differences come supreme teaching moments. But there's a time to teach and a time not to teach. It's time to teach when: 1) people are not threatened (trying to teach when people feel threatened will only increase resentment, so wait for or create a new situation in which the person feels more secure and receptive); 2) you're not angry or frustrated, when you have feelings of affection, respect, and inward security; and 3) when the other person needs help and support (to rush in with success formulas when someone is emotionally low or fatigued or under a lot of pressure is comparable to trying to teach a drowning man to swim). Remember: We are teaching one thing or another all of the time, because we are constantly radiating who and what we are.

Teaching other people is one of the best ways to expand your Circle of Influence.

Executives Are Not Exempt

I have come to believe that this process of teaching and learning unfreezes the old images people have of each other. When those images refreeze, people are able to perform at a new level.

When an ever-increasing number of people start helping each other to fulfill their appointed roles, a positive culture develops. A learning organization is nothing more or less than a group of people who help each other fulfill their respective missions, roles, and goals.

Some executives feel that they are exempt from teaching what they learn, either because they are supposed to know it all already or because teaching is a foreign and frightening experience for them. Some leaders even have a psychological fear of teaching. Executives tend to stay with their developed skillset, and they may see teaching as a new, undeveloped skill.

We have some clients who feel that they have "been there, done that" with our material. But when they get involved in teaching our material, they see many new applications. One corporation, for instance, now requires that one third of the teaching be done by the top executives. These executives tend to stand out as models and examples of

what they are teaching; they experience the four benefits I've mentioned; and they transfer more benefits of their training and development investment.

To expand your Circle of Influence, be proactive in teaching. As you examine your *Circle of Concern*, you will see that there are many people and things over which you have little or no control; but you will also see that you can do something about a few things—and could have influence with several people.

Reactive people tend to focus on blaming and accusing attitudes, reactive language, and increased feelings of victimization. The negative energy generated by that focus, combined with neglect in areas they could do something about, causes their *Circle of Concern* to grow and their *Circle of Influence* to shrink.

Proactive people seek to expand their *Circle of Influence* to benefit more people. They take initiative to make things happen. They subordinate feelings to values and choose their response. They do not blame circumstances, conditions, or conditioning for their behavior. Their behavior is a product of their choices, based on values, rather than a product of their conditions, based on feelings.

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Teaching is a proactive behavior. I believe that our basic nature is to act, and not be acted upon. Proactive behavior not only enables us to choose our response to circumstances, but it also empowers us to change and even create our circumstances. As we are open to influence from others (teachable), we will have more influence with them (as a teacher). As we involve others (our students or program participants) meaningfully, we will gain more influence with them.

Much of the money spent on training and development is wasted because participants come away with very little take-home value. Most learning evaporates overnight, because few learners teach the material to a broader audience. In some cases, executives no longer expect that training will have a significant impact; in fact, they may think of training as a way to increase knowledge and skills in technical areas only.

My promise to you is this: Applying this simple concept of teaching what you learn will pay big dividends. By such small things shall great plans and projects come to fruition.

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