

Entrepreneur Forum

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Andragogy versus Pedagogy **The Secret to Successful Business Learning** By Scott C. Nevins

There are two ways that people learn:

- Pedagogy is the learning of basic facts.
- Andragogy is applying the facts to different situations.

Successful business leaders are masters of andragogy.

Until 1986, I had never heard the terms pedagogy or andragogy used. In 1986 I left GE Capital and accepted a position as Director of Sales and Marketing at an early-stage computer education company. I learned that people learn the basics of a subject through pedagogical training and they learn advanced levels of a subject through andragogical training methods.

LEARNING IN COLLEGE

Think back to your college education. Think about the difference between lecture classes and workshop classes. In the lecture classes, you sat back and took notes and learned the basic facts. To do well on the tests, you simply needed to regurgitate the facts back on the test. In workshop classes, you would generally work with a partner and attempt to apply the knowledge you had learned in the lectures to the particular problem. The results were less certain. You needed to use your mind and creativity to forge forward to an appropriate conclusion.

LEADERS NEED TO BE ABLE TO THINK-ON-THEIR-FEET.

This is a common expression that is used, but the real meaning is often overlooked. Successful leaders need to quickly gather the facts and quickly make decisions. They recognize that time is not an ally and a no-decision is a certain path to failure. But, they also realize that in a short period of time they might not be able to get all of the facts to make a fully educated decision. Knowing that they must make a decision, they use the facts as they know them at the time and extrapolate them to the particular situation that they are faced with. This approach to decision making is the andragogy approach to learning.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, THE LEARNING MODEL

When people talk about artificial intelligence, this too is a form of andragogical learning. As more and more data points are amassed, the decision making process get more refined and better decisions are made.

WHY PEOPLE LEARN ...

It is important for someone to have basic knowledge. This is why people go to school. But, unfortunately, this is where many people's learning stops. Haven't you heard the expression – "In the real world, things are different". What this means is that as important as it is to learn the basics, it is equally important to learn how to apply the basics to real life situations. People learn for two reasons – because they want to and/or because they have to. Think of the things that you have learned after graduating from college. Many of the things you have learned are directly related to your current job you are performing. On the other hand, you may have decided to learn other things like cooking, tennis, golf, or gardening.

PARENTAL LEARNING

Probably one of the best examples of andragogical learning is learning how to be a parent. In school (or perhaps from your friends or parents) you learned about how babies are made. Don't worry, this will not turn out to be a sex education session.

Assuming you are a parent now – where did you learn to be a parent? You experienced how your parents treated you and you had the opportunity of watching others parenting their children. Being a parent means learning as you go and trying to make the best possible decisions based upon the current situations and past experiences. Different situations come up every day and it is important that you bring to the table your existing experiences and knowledge and be able to apply these to the current situation. Rarely are two situations exactly alike. Being a good parent means being able to use your ability to learn using the andragogy method.

If you are not yet a parent, be prepared to use your andragogical learning methodology.

A REAL LIFE EXAMPLE IN SALES

At ClientSoft, our technology was used to build a graphical user interface to mainframe legacy applications. The simplest way of thinking about what ClientSoft does is comparing it to Microsoft Windows and DOS. Microsoft Windows makes DOS easier to use, similar to how ClientSoft makes the IBM mainframe easier to use.

When we were in the sales process we would demonstrate our product to a prospect by showing them how the product worked using their live data. For example we would take a mainframe screen that had lots of information on it such as account and financial information, and we would quickly convert it into a simple to use graphical window.

It always amazed me that the customer needed to see the same demonstration on several pieces of their data to gain the comfort level that the product would work for their entire application. It was not enough to show them converting five pieces of account information. Quite often they would want to see us convert five pieces of some other type of information like customer history or order entry information even though we were not demonstrating anything new.

People are accustomed to the Missouri "Show Me" philosophy. Seeing is believing.

TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS

Successful leaders and business professions trust their instincts and have learned to apply their knowledge.

Most of us consider learning an ongoing process. We set targets for ourselves of where we want to be in the future and determine what we will need to get there. Experience is andragogical learning. Time alone does not translate to learning.

CHOOSING MY FIRST COMPANY TO WORK FOR AFTER COLLEGE

I still remember when I graduated from college and interviewed at dozens of companies. I really put time and effort into identifying those companies that I thought could best provide me with the types of experiences I wanted to enable me to rise quickly within their organizations to provide me the experiences I felt I needed to enable me to create successful businesses of my own.

I received dozens of offers from companies like IBM, GE, Perkin Elmer, Clairol, United Technologies, and others. Although I really wanted to work for IBM when I graduated, I could not bring myself to accept the position. In fact, I had three different offers from IBM to choose from. The IBM representatives told me that it was a well-defined ten plus year path to becoming a Senior Manager. There were several defined steps that needed to happen. I kept asking the question, "Can't you just tell me the types of skills and experiences you feel I will need and allow me to gain them more rapidly?" The answer was no, we know what works for us and we have a proven track record to show why this makes sense.

To make a long story short, I accepted a position with GE Capital. They had just started their Information Systems Management Training Program. It was intended to be a fast track to management and they were going to provide the learning tools to rapidly achieve the goals. Clearly, it would be important to do well – I felt that as long as I was given the opportunity to control my own success, this was the right place for me to begin my career. The program worked and spring-boarded my career; something that I am extremely grateful to GE for the opportunity.

GE facilitated the andragogical style while IBM focused more on the pedagogical style.

Leaders gravitate to the andragogical style of learning while followers gravitate to the pedagogical style.

THE SECURITIES INDUSTRY

In 2000 I earned my Series 7 Securities license. I decided that I could expand my value to early-stage companies by obtaining my securities license. Having successfully raised substantial sums of monies for my businesses, I determined that I could improve myself by learning the financial side of the transaction.

The learning process was brutal. It was a self-study program. It had a lengthy study guide and thirteen challenging study tests. The learning was truly pedagogical. Due to the security laws and regulations, there is no room for deviation. After spending about three months, I took the exam and passed with flying colors.

The net result was that I achieved my goal which was to round out my experience and capabilities.

SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS LEARNING

The moral of the story is that there are two ways to learn – pedagogy and andragogy. When learning the basics, people are taught using the pedagogical style.

The key to successful business learning is mastering the andragogical style. Situations are unique, different, and exciting – successful leaders adapt and learn on the fly making the best possible educated decisions based upon the information at the time.

About Scott C. Nevins

Mr. Nevins is a recognized business leader with an impressive track record spanning more than two decades. He has successfully built four emerging technology and service companies. He has extensive knowledge in the areas of mergers & acquisitions and private financing. His forte is early-stage pre-IPO software, wireless, and service companies. His passion, desire to teach, never-give-up can-do attitude and integrity inspire those associated with him to be winners. He is a visionary with a clear focus on execution, delivering products and services that exceed the expectations of his customers.

Mr. Nevins is a recipient of the Ernst & Young “Entrepreneur of the Year” finalist award in 2000 and his company, ClientSoft, is a recipient of the Deloitte & Touche Fast 50 Awards in 1999 and 2000.

Mr. Nevins was most recently the *President and COO* of **GiantBear**, a leading wireless data services company selling ASP services directly to wireless carriers including Cingular. GiantBear was successfully sold in December 2001.

Prior to GiantBear, Mr. Nevins was the *CEO and President* of **ClientSoft**, a leading software technology company selling products and services to large-scale enterprises including ADP, Allstate, Coca Cola, Dow Jones, Farmers Insurance, Goodyear, and Motorola. Mr. Nevins currently sits on the Board of Directors.

Mr. Nevins began his career with **GE Capital** in the IT and sales organizations.

Mr. Nevins graduated cum laude in 1980 with a Bachelor of Science degree from **Fairfield University** where he majored in mathematics and computer science.

Mr. Nevins has two wonderful sons, ages 15 and 3, and is an avid competitive tennis player.