



# Can Your Employees Learn Faster?

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FUTURIST ALVIN TOFFLER WRITES IN *Power Shift*, "What is happening is that the knowledge load and, more important, the decision load are being redistributed. In a continual cycle of learning, unlearning and relearning, workers need to master new techniques, adapt to new organization forms and come up with new ideas."

But in our culture, while teaching and training have become art forms, learning has yet to be mastered. Consider the percentage of entry-level workers who require remedial training to satisfy even the most basic job requirements. And how many personnel (including executives) attend company-sponsored training events, only to forget in a short time what they learned there?

Worse, if we're having such a hard time learning the information available now, how will we ever deal effectively with the information explosion to come in the Information Age? How will we handle the information superhighway of the future if we can't even handle the information footpath of the past?

Think of the millions of dollars spent each year by organizations to train employees in basic job functions, new technologies, fundamental academic skills, customer service, sales and so on. How effective is that training? How many employees are given a text or manual and can't get through it? How many are sitting in the classroom and staring off into space? How many are sitting at computer terminals, reading but not remembering? How many employees are just not "getting it"? And how much is this costing Corporate America in productivity and earnings per share?

Training costs money, and many companies are in fact wasting their dollars. Yes, some organizations train well: they spend the money, devote the time and dedicate the people necessary. But there are many more companies that train poorly, which means that retraining is then needed to avoid substandard performance.

Also, over the past thirty years the

complexity of jobs has increased dramatically. Virtually every position now requires more knowledge and skills than ever before. If traditional training methods have had limited success in the past, what hope do they offer for the future? How can companies that now train poorly become effective trainers? How can companies that already train well increase training effectiveness and efficiency?

Accelerated learning affords the opportunity for organizations to do just this. By our methods, employees learn more quickly than by traditional methods because we allow them to learn in their own ways. Accelerated learning can shorten the cycle of training development and increase the amount of information covered. The method is interactive and multi-sensory and meets the learning needs of all employees, not just those who learn best in a traditional learning environment.

One way to understand accelerated learning is to think of the way the memory works when it's working well. What is it that we can remember easily, and why? Our method focuses on:

■ *A stress-free environment* – When the brain senses fear, it activates stress mechanisms in the body. In many traditional training classes, learners feel anxious – they are afraid of failing, afraid of being embarrassed, afraid to look bad. But we learn better when we are relaxed. Eliminating learner stress therefore improves the ability of the learner's brain to store and recall new information. Accelerated learning fosters an atmosphere of trust and openness.

■ *A learner-centered philosophy* – Control is not an issue in accelerated learning. In the traditional learning environment the teacher is authoritarian – control is the focus. In our environment the teacher is authoritative and learning is the focus.

■ *Multi-sensory learning* – Beyond the traditional auditory processes (reading, listening, speaking), we make equal use of visual learning and kinesthetic learning. The more sensory channels that are

incorporated into learning, the deeper and more permanent the learning becomes.

■ *High energy levels* – Learning is optimized when the brain is active. When learners feel bored, their brains either shut down or find other stimuli. Traditional learning methods are often passive events for learners (active for the teacher), whereas in accelerated learning the learner's mental and physical energy are kept high throughout the learning experience because the learner is more actively involved in the process.

■ *An enriched environment* – By using peripheral materials to teach, learning can be increased by 25 percent. The use of engaging activities increases the involvement of the learner, and the more involved the learner is, the deeper the learning will be.

■ *Using both hemispheres of the brain* – Besides the logical and linear approaches to topics (left-brain activities), we incorporate creativity, art, color, form, rhythm, rhyme and music (right-brain activities).

All these principles can be used both in the classroom and for computer-based training.

If Alvin Toffler is correct, information will be the most valuable commodity in the 21st century. Accelerated learning is an effective tool that can help us learn new information faster, store it longer and recall it on demand. Accelerated learning can therefore be the "power shift" of learning for the next century. ●



Paul L. Morris holds a BS in mathematics from the City College of New York. After spending 25 years in the field of computer science, he started Learning Power, a consulting firm specializing in classroom and computer-based accelerated learning for industry.