

'Mission Matters in Training'

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"I am an eagle, stretching my wings to their fullest extent so that through me developing my capacities, I inspire and teach to make it possible for others to stretch their wings too" (A Trainer participant's Training Mission Statement: PP accelerated Learning Trainer Development Program)

New Year, a time for reflection and renewal. In this article I invite you to revisit and for some, consider for the first time, what your mission in life is, as an individual on this planet and specifically as a member of the training and development community.

By mission, I mean having a sense of being on a unique journey, along which your potential unfolds. If you live each day with energy and a sense of purpose in your life then it is likely that you are indeed, living out your mission, albeit at the unconscious level. However, if you feel stuck, low in energy and motivation, it could be that your sense of mission is missing or weak. The question then is how to develop and strengthen a sense of mission in our lives. As trainers this is a crucial question. You will no doubt recall the experience and the benefits of being engaged in learning with a passionate and competent facilitator. And you may also have experienced, the consequences of being taught by an educator who is neither passionate nor competent in his/her field. It would not be too difficult to guess which category most trainers and educators would like to belong to.

My proposition today is that developing mission is a high-leverage technique for increasing your passion and competence in your work. I'll share three aspects of People Potential's work on mission with trainers. First, is the process of discovering one's own unique mission and mission-driven capabilities. Second, what happens when you integrate these unique capabilities into your training. Third, some tools that can help facilitate this process. In each case we'll be sharing examples, insights & conclusions

Discovering your unique mission

As with all effective training, the starting point has to be ourselves. In 1999, as a part of an internal People Potential capacity building process we worked on strengthening our individual, unique mission in training. For me, there were 3 stages in this process, Adopting mission as a presupposition, Documenting the journey and Identifying Mission-driven Capabilities

Adopting Mission as a presupposition

As a social scientist raised in a largely secular environment I was skeptical of the concept of "mission" which conjured up a picture of religiously zealous colonisers

engaged in conversion of indigenous animist peoples. In the HR world mission often signifies a poster, often beautifully framed, that hangs on the wall of large organisations yet have little to do with the practice of the staff working there.

What helped me become open to reinterpreting mission is having lived in the East, immersed in Eastern cultures for many years, my involvement with NLP and the joy of working with a team of people who have spent years consciously developing their mission, notably though my work with Marianne Vincent. What this exposure led to was my decision to presuppose, at least for the moment, that we each do have a mission in life and to choose to suspend any doubts that arose, at least for the moment!

Mission-driven capabilities

The next task was to identify the specific elements of that mission. For this I needed to document my journey so far. This is best done I discovered, from an dissociated observer perspective - using a set of core questions: What were the activities in which I engaged and lost track of time? What were my passions? What had others told me and I had brushed aside as being unimportant? What had I achieved and aspired to achieving? What surfaced were a number of recurring themes, namely health, environment, community and art and yet it was abundantly clear that many of these passions had either been neglected over the years or remained separate from my HR and training work.

Mission Statement

Having surfaced some of my unique mission-driven capabilities it was a simple step to formulate a mission statement incorporating all these elements. To be effective a mission statement needs to be short and simple as well as powerful and easy to remember. Here is an example.

"I am an artist, developing my brush strokes to facilitate the growth of a sustainable learning, training community, beginning with myself and my family."

Next was the question of how to make the mission statement come alive and integrate these elements into my training practice. The ideal opportunity came with the redesign of a 6 month Trainer Development Program.

Integrating Mission- driven capabilities into the TDP

The unconscious mind is powerful - thus once the question of "How to integrate?" was posed - responses and solutions surfaced. With Marianne's encouragement I first focused on experimenting with artists' materials and producing murals, templates and maps, to facilitate, in a variety of ways, the outcomes of our Trainer Development Modules. The important point here is that while I do not lay claim to being a skilled, trained artist I was accessing a visual-spatial intelligence that is an important part of my being.

Encouraged by the results from using art in these ways, I then consciously began to incorporate other mission-driven capabilities, my concern for the environment and my need to work with and develop community. The process continues, keeping in mind the requirements and outcomes for the program and the particular composition of the participants.

The Results

There are three levels of results that are significant.

For me as a trainer of trainers, for the participants and for those with whom the participants interact.

For me, as a trainer, this integration process has helped me begin to feel more centred, more whole in my work as boundaries began to melt between different compartments in my life. What that has meant is a shift in my energy to being more authentic more of the time. By deliberately presenting my passions upfront I have been laying bare more of who I am and what my mission is about, being more accessible and of course more vulnerable.

As for the effect on the Trainee participants - well the first thing that I noticed was a heightened ability in artistic expression amongst the whole group, some far exceeding my efforts, even in their first attempt! For example, their first thought maps were of an extremely high calibre, conceptually reflecting my work but using their own metaphors and creativity. My examples had catalysed their own inner capacities in ways I had not anticipated. How much more powerful it must have been to be an apprentice to Leonardo Da Vinci?

Faster skill Transfer. The learning from this was that I could deliberately apply this technique (known in NLP as modelling) to increase the speed of skill transfer in many other aspects of trainer development.

Heightened motivation in training. These trainees were mainly technical specialists, many of whom had had little or no training in teaching methodology. Their motivation was often understandably low but as they became visibly more skilled and excited about their own artistic ways of expression this in turn increased their passion for training.

Increased effectiveness: This passion had cascading benefits for their participants, who discovered how much fun learning technical material could be and who then gave higher ratings to their trainers. One key reason for this was the development of the trainers' own unique capacities.

Skill transfer and bonding in the family. Trainees also experimented creatively with their own families, teaching their children learning to learn tools such as thoughtmapping. As a result, not only did their children discover useful study tools they also began to bond more closely with their parents. Stories from fathers who had previously been too exhausted to play with their children now

revealed that after work they were energised by the post-working day creativity sessions.

Another benefit is that this process not only fosters the development of artists who use the same mode of representation but also catalyses the development of all sorts of other forms of expression. For example, one year later we found that in one organisation, there now exists: a master story teller, a master program designer, a master poster-maker, a master musician, master environmentalist among others. This indicates that my accessing my mission was a catalyst for them to access theirs and this operated largely on an unconscious level. Clearly the more aware we are of this in our work the more profound the results can be both in the work place and outside.

Conclusion

I have been humbled by the power and range of impact of some seemingly simple steps. It appears that the more authentic and vulnerable I am, in my training and the more I live out of the mission that is unfolding for me, the more incredible are the results of my participants, far exceeding my own modest efforts. The conclusion is two-fold, to change the world, as Gandhi stated so simply, we must first look to changing ourselves and accessing our mission in life is central to getting this right.

As a trainer we must be prepared to be the exemplar, not from ego but borne of the knowledge that our participants, whether we like it or not, learn from our totality, not only from the curriculum we are explicitly contracted to deliver. In the next article I will delve into the implications of developing mission for our professional development.

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