

The “Think Outside the Field” Contest!

Did you know that rich world countries are losing ground to developing countries in the area of innovation? http://www.economist.com/opinion/displaystory.cfm?story_id=15908408 Think this has implications for WLP professionals? As Sarah Palin would say – “You betcha!”

We all know all about the speed and constancy of change. We know about globalization and virtual teams, how technology is revolutionizing how we learn and share, how inter-connected everything is. But when we have a question about something, or need a resource on some WLP topic, where do most of us look for resources? We look *within* our field – we talk to other WLP experts, we consult WLP books, we go to WLP websites. I’m not suggesting that’s bad. *Of course* we should seek out expertise from within our field. We have a great deal of knowledge, and if they were smart, more people would listen to *us*! What I’m suggesting is that, in our great, big, interconnected world, there is much we can learn and apply to *our* field from fields outside our own. And if we want to help our organizations continue to be innovation leaders in the world, we’re going to need as many resources in as many fields as possible.

Some examples: Behavioral economists are re-thinking much of what they know about economics, and the way they’re going about it could be a case study on learning itself.

David Whyte is a consultant who works with large companies on communication issues. His background? Fulltime poet. His knowledge of language and words has proved invaluable to these companies as they look to reach new levels of collaboration and sharing.

Distinguished author Robert Fritz tells of the profound business lessons he learned from... a clarinet instructor at the Boston Conservatory of Music. Roger Nierenberg wrote a book about leadership based on his experiences as an orchestra conductor.

Even at ICE- Alia Crum spoke about her research on mindset, which she defined as “a state or frame of mind that influences your response.” She found in her research that an individual’s *mindset* toward stress can lead to either an enhanced or diminished outcome. She also discovered that people can experience *physiological* change simply by changing their mindsets. I think Crum’s research has profound implications for WLP professionals, but how many of us are even aware of these kinds of studies? (Find Crum’s article elsewhere on our website.)

And consider the final session of ICE. Second City Communications gave us the opportunity to consider how the skills used in improv can be applied in our organizations.

Many of our organizational problems are systemic, yet how many WLP professionals are conversant in systems thinking? At one of the concurrent sessions I attended at ICE, the facilitator asked how many in the room were familiar with complexity theory. Out of approximately 80 people, fewer than five hands went up! Personally, I think we have some work to do! (Systems Thinking Forum, anyone?)

So to help us explore fields beyond our own, I'm sponsoring a "Think Outside the Field" contest. How have you applied knowledge from *outside* the WLP field to accomplish the WLP objectives in your organization? How are you *thinking* about applying knowledge from outside our field? Tell me the story, and what you did (or are doing, or are thinking about doing). Tell me about barriers, challenges, success, failure, learnings. Tell me how you learned about the innovation that you're implementing/the "outside the field" consultant that you're using/the "outside the field" research that you're applying. Tell me about the lessons you've learned that are directly applicable to WLP.

Alternatively, share with me the resources you use to learn about what's going on outside of our field *that you can apply to your work*. Are there journals that you read? Websites you peruse? One of my own favorites is the Economist Magazine (www.economist.com). There's a great deal of information reported in the Economist – under topics like science and technology, culture, and economics – that are directly applicable to workplace learning and performance. Just to be clear – I'm not interested in what you read to learn about topics outside of our field. I'm interested in learning about what you read to learn about topics outside of our field – *that you then apply (or could apply) to workplace learning and performance*.

Every contest needs a prize, and here's mine – I will convene a panel of senior leaders in WLP to review the contest entries. The winner will have the opportunity to write an article about his or her experience for a future edition of *Training Today*. S/he will also receive a \$50 gift card. The next top three entry submitters will have the opportunity to write a synopsis of their work for *Training Today*. We will also publish the best resources that we receive in *Training Today*; submitters will be acknowledged for their entries.

Yes, the contest criteria are loose. That's intentional; I want to cast a wide net here.

Send me your stories or resources by Friday, July 23. Please include your name and contact information.

How many "outside the field" stories are out there? I don't know. Maybe none! But I'm eager to see what's there, and to share those stories with our membership. I continue to believe that now, more than ever, we need each other to continue to be successful as WLP professionals. We need to learn what we can from wherever we can. Let's explore the world beyond our boundaries!

Regards,
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