

BRILLIANCE

by

DESIGN

Creating
Learning
Experiences
That

Connect,

Inspire,

and

ENGAGE

*Free
Assessment
Included*

VICKI HALSEY

An Excerpt From

*Brilliance by Design:
Creating Learning Experiences That Connect, Inspire, and Engage*

by Vicki Halsey

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Preface

Brilliance by Design will show you how to bring passion, relationship, purpose, and success to every learning opportunity. It captures the best of what I've learned from mentors, friends, students, and colleagues through my 35 years of helping people learn and creating high-impact instructional design. It combines that knowledge with 20+ years of brain and learning behavioral research to arm you with hundreds of new strategies and practices to add to your repertoire. *Brilliance by Design* will help you align your best intentions with your methods and objectives and mobilize passionate learners to get amazing results.

Extreme Engagement

The secret to powerful instruction is engagement—involving learners in activities in which they do the work of interacting with new content, wrestling with concepts, and teaching those concepts to others. Learner-centered classrooms, training rooms, and meeting rooms—wherever learning is happening—are noisy and alive with energetic activity as learners think out loud, build knowledge, conceive their own models for understanding, and practice applying those models. The learners talk more while the teacher talks and presents less. As people hear their own voices and engage in challenges designed to help them understand at deeper levels, they learn by teaching. They access more of their potential and contribute at higher levels, resulting in retention and application over time. In this dynamic world, the teacher's job is to engage learners in myriad ways: to connect them to ideas and skills, challenge them and support their accruing knowledge, celebrate their brilliance, and help them apply their learning to real-world situations. In teaching, you consciously connect in order to engage, and you engage in order to create new meaning, beliefs, and behaviors.

It is rigorous work that energizes both learners and teachers and builds continuously on deep connections.

Brilliance Is a Trajectory

When my son Nicholas came home from his first year at college, he was clearly excited about everything he had experienced—but all he could talk about was how he had nailed a particular question on one of his finals. I heard him share with his dad how he masterfully pulled a discrete fact from his brain and figured out the trick in the question. He also shared his insight with me, the neighbors, two friends, and with his grandmother on the phone. If you were to call him, I am sure he would share it with you, too.

Every parent wants his or her child to feel brilliant. As I listened to Nick, however, I was struck by how rare it is to hear that kind of joy in one's outpouring of creativity and genius. We hear people talk about sports, movies, the weather, or what they had for dinner, but seldom about the times when they felt brilliant. What series of events leads to learning moments where everything clicks and comes together—the right information, powers of observation, and the ability to think and articulate those thoughts?

I realized that *brilliance is a trajectory*. It is a relationship filled with requests, clear expectations, mindful practice, and learning over time. Nick's ability to answer the test question came from a carefully orchestrated combination of clear information, hard work, and learning from lectures, DVDs, practical labs, and peer study groups. The integration of each of these activities allowed him to confidently weave a quarter's worth of acquired knowledge from a variety of sources into brilliance. *It was brilliance, designed.*

Replace “Sit ‘n’ Get” with “Woo ‘n’ Do”

What distinguishes *Brilliance by Design* from most books on learning is that it contains a specific instructional design model that revolutionizes typical teaching methods. It upturns the passive “sit ‘n’ get” format ingrained in our culture and replaces it with a proven model for optimal learning that “woos” people as they “do” the work. I share in these pages my secrets, tips, tools, and strategies as well as stories of my successes and failures and what I learned from them. I invite you to take this information and use it to unleash the brilliance in others, achieve powerful outcomes, and build communities of learners—confident learners who will share best practices and communicate at a deep and profound level as they take your content out into the world and do the real work to transform it.

Brilliance by Design articulates a three-part system—the Brilliance Learning System:

- Part 1 focuses on strategies to develop your *content*, or **what** you are going to teach;

- Part 2 helps you gain a deeper understanding of the **people** in the learning equation (learners and teachers), or **who** you want to learn; and
- Part 3 gives you hundreds of ideas to implement each aspect of the six-step ENGAGE Learning Design Model that, when followed, is **how** you are going to unleash brilliance.

To help inspire and facilitate your ability to move key concepts to action, please interact with the content of the book and complete the activities, questions, and challenges. This will help you gain a deeper awareness of your thoughts, generate greater meaning, and move the learning to high-impact application.

Brilliance Is Not a Random Act

Brilliance is not a random act. It is the result of learning over time—having the space to dig deep into preexisting learning and combine it with new knowledge, resulting in unique thoughts. It is about people, content, and a structure for learning designed to connect, inspire, and engage.

Learning is a deep, compelling human connection. It is the gateway to optimal life experiences. Learning *transforms people's lives*. And teaching, in any forum, is the art and science of bringing out the brilliance that drives those transformations.

People are naturally brilliant in their own unique ways. Our brilliance—our intelligence, talent, skills, and creativity—resides close to the surface, waiting to emerge through inspiration and rigorous work. This process of connecting with our innate brilliance to further our learning also connects us to the best in ourselves and the best in others. It empowers us and makes us feel alive. It is the extraordinary privilege of a teacher—and by *teacher* I want to be clear that this means *anyone* who seeks to bring out the best in others—to facilitate the full potential, the brilliance, of every learner in every learning situation.

Teaching, in any forum, is the art and science of bringing out the brilliance that drives transformations.

The Tragedy of Too Few Brilliant Moments

The last time I trained at a Fortune 100 company, during our break I walked past the doorway of a nearby training room and glanced in at the participants. They reminded me of characters in the old movie *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*: glazed faces, blank stares—people sitting motionless and

looking at a PowerPoint slide show while a well-meaning instructor talked a blue streak.

In the workplace today and in classrooms around the world, there are too many opportunities to leave our brains at the door and too few opportunities for brilliance. People are asked to come to meetings or training with no advance notice about what is going to be discussed and no opportunity to prepare. Then they are expected to provide meaningful input into key decisions and outcomes that will impact the organization long into the future. We give them huge notebooks of information and, after quickly reviewing it with them, expect them to remember it all and instantly put the concepts into action. And we are consistently disappointed when they do not immediately close new business or use the information accurately. In short, we often set people up to fail, and then we are irritated when they do.

Unlock Brilliance in Any Situation

So how can you create more opportunities for people to unleash their brilliance? *Brilliance by Design* shows you a proven, powerful educational design for creating optimal learning experiences every time you teach by using a learner-centered and active—not passive—approach. It revolutionizes typical teaching methodologies to get your learners sitting on the edge of their seats and eagerly anticipating learning.

In the early years of my career as a teacher, counselor, and school administrator, I worked with kids from every walk of life—from children of famous scientists to the toughest, most challenging gang members. From juvenile detention centers to jails, from gifted and special education classrooms to after-school detention and study groups, I helped kids find success when others had given up. In my current role as Vice President of Applied Learning at The Ken Blanchard Companies, I write, teach, and deliver powerful learning systems for corporate clients like Nike, Wells Fargo-Wachovia, Gap, Microsoft, and GlaxoSmithKline while teaching executive leadership courses at two universities. Like you, my role changes day to day, minute to minute. No matter what role you or I play in life, when it comes right down to it, to be highly successful, each of us needs to be a learner *and* a teacher. The circular energy that arises from the mutuality of teaching and learning is a powerful, fulfilling connection.

Each Person Has a Unique Contribution

From the classroom to the boardroom, learning starts with the fundamental fact that each person exists to make a unique contribution to the world.

Every teacher needs to find a way to reach joyfully into the soul of learners and facilitate their brilliance so that they can make their contributions. It is my hope that *Brilliance by Design* will help you pursue and achieve that transformational goal.

The Brilliance Learning System Applies to Any Learning Situation

The Brilliance Learning System is fractal in nature. You can use it to teach in any learning situation, including but not limited to classrooms, meetings, workshops, and keynote speeches. You can use it to coach one person at a time, to facilitate a virtual sales meeting with your global team, to train a roomful of people at all levels in an organization, or to give a keynote address to thousands. The core principles apply equally well regardless of the amount of time: forty-minute meetings, hour-long keynotes, or four-day training sessions. This system helps anyone who brings people together for the purpose of learning, problem solving, or innovating to develop a clear, high-impact training design; analyze learner and teacher needs; create objectives that meet those needs; incorporate interactive tools that “fire ‘em up”; ensure compliance with all key outcomes; and send people out into the world feeling empowered to change their lives.

Preview of What’s Ahead: The Book at a Glance

The introduction, “The Time for Brilliance Has Come” relates stories of inspirational teachers who have had a profound impact, takes a close look at how and why these teachers were so remarkable, and describes the three parts of the Brilliance Learning System: People, Content, and Learning Design.

Chapter 1, “Fire Up the Synergy between Learners and Teachers,” explains the power of a highly collaborative relationship and explores in detail the first component of the Brilliance Learning System: People. You will learn about the revolutionary premise *Whoever is doing the teaching is doing the learning* as well as the three pivotal 70/30 Principles that rebalance the learning equation and reframe the mindset of the teacher. You also will learn how to leverage compelling human connections to inspire intellectual passion while catalyzing your own strengths and the strengths of your learners.

In **Chapter 2**, you will learn to “Craft Content That Sings” and commit to the second component of the Brilliance Learning System: Content. The clarity of your content, crafted into a meaningful model, can be a power

tool for interactive, retainable learning. Presenting it in digestible pieces and through concrete examples sets learners up for success and makes recall attainable. You'll read true stories that illustrate how important it is to tap into and sometimes shift learners' beliefs in order for them to be open to new learning.

The third component of the Brilliance Learning System, Learning Design, is detailed in **Chapters 3 through 9**. Chapter 3 is a quick overview of the ENGAGE Model. It will help you see the total flow and structure to enable you to bring out the brilliance in others. The subsequent chapters walk you through the model step by step for a deeper look and a chance to move your learning to action through templates and activities.

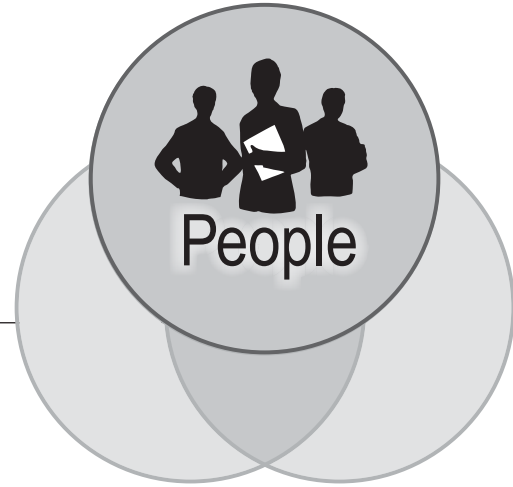
Chapters 4 through 9 also expand on each of the six steps of the ENGAGE Model. These chapters give you hundreds of ideas, strategies, and practices for how to energize and value learners, make knowledge accessible and meaningful, assess and celebrate learning, and apply and extend the learning in their lives. I will share with you a treasure trove of learning activities for all types of learners, the basis for multiple approaches, and tips and insights, tested over time, that I have developed myself or learned and borrowed from my many brilliant teachers.

Chapter 10, "Bringing Out Brilliance in the Virtual Classroom," shows you how to take advantage of digital technology so that you will be able to more specifically connect, inspire, and engage the online learner. It overflows with creative tools and strategies for maximizing learning in the virtual classroom and it focuses on the power of connecting learners to their core purpose.

Tap all opportunities.

A Great Teacher Is Like a Great Athlete

While it may not be intuitive to be a great teacher, it is something you can learn. If you use the Brilliance Learning System and the ENGAGE Model, you will develop your abilities and ensure your successes. You will learn to impart information in a way that consistently improves your skill and helps you align your intentions with your efforts. You will send your learners out the door armed with tools and strategies for applying their new knowledge in their lives when they need it. Being a great teacher is like being a great athlete: It is a constant challenge, but if you are willing to learn and grow, you can keep getting better. Hard work and practice make all the difference in the kind of learning that transforms lives.



CHAPTER 1

Fire Up the Synergy between Learners and Teachers

Dale Chihuly is a renowned glass sculptor. His bold, colorful pieces come from a range of influences and include simple and exotic forms found in nature such as spheres and cylinders, sea creatures, and desert cacti. You can see them in museums, office buildings, hotels, and outdoor landscapes around the world. However, his most exciting contribution to the art glass world has to be his extraordinarily innovative idea of bringing together teams of artists with exceptional glassblowing abilities to create large-scale, spectacular glass sculptures. Led by Chihuly's vision and direction, these casts of collaborators engage in highly physical, dramatic productions in which they create pieces that result from the synergy of all the artists' specialized skills. By combining their talents, these teams collectively produce unique art pieces that would not otherwise come into being.¹

This artistic collaboration is a powerful analogy to the synergy that evolves during the teaching and learning process that unleashes brilliance. Each of us brings our individual talents, skills, and knowledge to the process. Just as Chihuly does, the teacher leads with purpose and vision. But the outcome—the unique learning and results for each individual you

influence—is completely dependent upon each learner’s willingness to join in as collaborator in the experience. Establishing this valuable teacher-learner relationship is an art and an essential ingredient to everyone’s success.

Synergy Gets Results

Synergy is all about working together and supporting each other’s success. A quick look in the dictionary tells us that synergy means “joint work, to work together, combined or cooperative action or force.”² Wikipedia says “A synergy is where different entities cooperate advantageously for a final outcome. If used in a business application it means that teamwork will produce an overall better result than if each person was working toward the same goal individually . . . a dynamic state in which combined action is favored over the difference of individual components.”³ Take a moment to think again of Dale Chihuly’s team of glassblowers. They are fired up, working together toward a common objective, bringing their individual strengths and talents forward, and supporting each other’s work—everyone contributing to create the resulting masterpiece. Your outcome will not take the form of a glass sculpture that looks like a sea anemone or octopus. It will, however, take form as crystallized knowledge and empowered skills in the minds and practices of your learners, and it will fuel productivity as well as individual, community, and organizational vitality. All this arises from the unique synergistic relationship you create with your learners throughout your learning session.

The Brilliance Learning System Starts with People: Learners and Teachers

The first component, and the foundation of the Brilliance Learning System, is people who create synergistic relationships. These relationships between learners and teachers can be defining and life changing. They can and must bring out the best in us and the best in others. Jaime Escalante in Los Angeles and my teacher David Wilson at UC Davis established relationships with their students that made them shift their beliefs, join in a common objective, and work extremely hard to meet high standards. Thomas Friedman, journalist, Pulitzer Prize winner, and author of best-selling books including *The World Is Flat*, once paid homage in a *New York Times* column to his high school journalism teacher, Hattie Steinberg. Friedman,



who credited Steinberg with “inspiring in him a love of reporting and newspapers,” took her Introduction to Journalism course in 1969 and never took, or felt he needed to take, another journalism class. In his column he described Hattie Steinberg as tough and “a woman of clarity in an age of uncertainty.” He explained that he and other students hung out in Steinberg’s room “as if it were a malt shop,” not because it was cool but because they “enjoyed being harangued by her, disciplined by her, and taught by her.” Friedman voiced his respect for his teacher and his gratitude for the lasting impact her lessons had on his life. He wrote, “I sit up straight just thinkin’ about her.”⁴ It sounds like Hattie Steinberg was as formidable and demanding as Jaime Escalante and as inspiring and courageous as David Wilson. She no doubt reminds you, at least a little, of a great teacher from whom you learned enduring truths.

When it comes down to it, inspired teachers who get their students to work hard and join them in a collaborative process are people we want to be around. We trust them. They demand a lot from us, but they also give a lot of themselves. Their enthusiasm for life ignites our own. They make learning safe by turning mistakes into opportunities for learning. They create an environment of trust and mutual respect. They design and implement strategies for rigorous work and risk taking that we value. We work harder because we want to.

Learners trust teachers who demonstrate their authenticity and reliability. Their words and actions are in alignment; they walk the talk. So when a teacher says, “This learning experience is about you, and you are going to learn X, Y, and Z,” that teacher is creating a learner-centered experience and indicating, quickly and persistently, that X, Y, and Z will be learned. Great synergies come from mutuality. The teacher creates an environment in which everyone really “shows up” and brings their best to the endeavor.

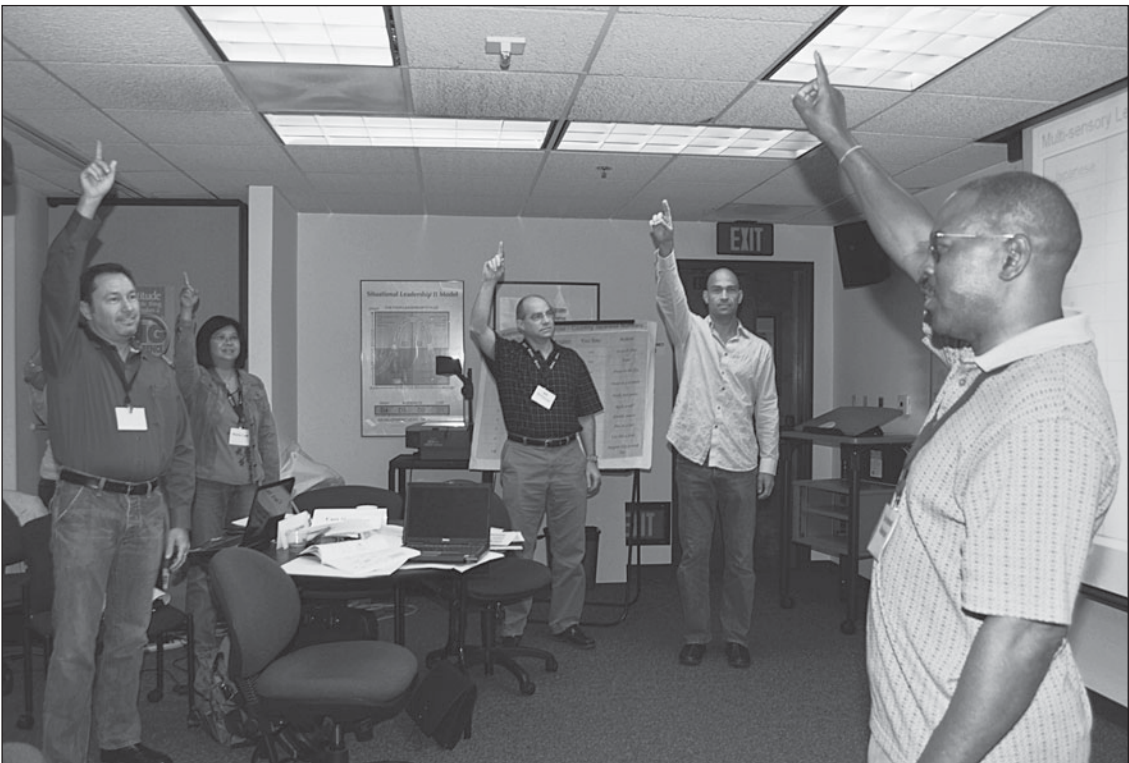
So how do you ensure that everyone brings their best to the endeavor? How do you align your best intentions with the learning design?

Rebalance the Learning Equation: The 70/30 Principle

Rebalancing the learning equation is a great way to start. In *Leadership from the Inside Out*, Kevin Cashman describes two different approaches he calls “streams of leadership.” One is an “extremely hard-driving . . . ‘I’ leader who gets results.” The other is a “more interpersonally connected . . . collaborative and synergistic . . . ‘We’ leader.” Cashman explains that individuals,

teams, and organizations thrive when we develop both the *I* and the *We* qualities in our leadership style.⁵

These two streams of leadership are as applicable and important in any learning situation as they are in leadership. To practice and enable the kind of learning that unlocks brilliance, we need to be vigilant about the dynamics of the *I* and the *We*. There is greater synergy when the space is created for everyone to step forward to perform in a tidelike rhythm and motion of exchange—a rolling back and forth where the teacher steps forward more forcefully, then steps back and makes space for the powerful voices and contributions of the learners. This demands a shift in teaching style and a letting go somewhat of ego. We've all heard the expression "Leave your ego at the door." This is a reminder that the possibilities inherent in highly synergistic relationships are only achievable in an environment where everyone's voice and contribution is heard and where everyone has the opportunity to develop. By letting go of ego, we also let go of judging people,



Learners become teachers.



including ourselves. This is important because when we feel better than or less than someone else, we are separating ourselves from others and may miss opportunities to connect with them.

Close your eyes for a moment. Place yourself in a traditional learning situation. What's happening? The teacher is at the front of the room, right? Who is doing the talking? The teacher, right? Who is standing, moving around the room? Who is engaged with the ideas and the information? Whose voice do you hear most of the time? Who's excited? The teacher, the teacher, and the teacher. I created the Brilliance Learning System to revolutionize that learning model. It is based on this key premise: *Whoever is doing the talking is doing the learning.*

A shift in focus will help you rebalance the learning equation, place the spotlight on the learners, engender active rather than passive learning, and change how you teach so that you and the learners really do bring the best to the endeavor and bring out brilliance. Three shifts support the 70/30 Principle.

Shift 1:
Learners Do 70 Percent of the Talking and 30 Percent of the Listening

The goal of the 70/30 Principle is for your learners to feel that they are at the center of the learning session and to get them actively learning. You can make this happen by shifting your focus from doing most of the talking and teaching (which often amounts to about 70 percent) to doing far less (about 30 percent). This establishes a more learner-centered focus and ensures greater ownership and success for the learner. It spotlights the *learner*, not you, as the focus of the learning session.

Be the guide on the side versus the sage on the stage.

Shift 2:
Teachers Dedicate 70 Percent of Their Preparation to How (Learning Design) and 30 Percent to What (Content) They Will Teach

It is common in most teacher-learner situations for the teacher to focus 70 percent of his or her time on preparing content and 30 percent on figuring out how to teach that content. With the Brilliance Learning System, we reverse that focus now and forevermore! *Commit yourself to focusing 30 percent of your time and energy on deciding what your objectives are, what key takeaways*

From:	To:
70% you talk/teach	70% they talk/do
70% what you are going to teach	70% how you are going to teach it
70% of time you teach skills	70% of time learners practice/build skills

Figure 1.1. Rebalancing the Learning Equation—the 70/30 Principle

you want for your learners, and what visuals you want to use, and 70 percent of your time and energy on how you will create activities and embed best learning practices.

That 70 percent effort goes into applying the ENGAGE Model, which I will walk you through in subsequent chapters. Learning Design, or *how* you teach, is the stage on which the learning story takes place, and it is the carefully planned central plot. It needs to be packed full of interactive learning opportunities and activities.

Shift 3:

Learners Spend 30 Percent of the Time Learning and 70 Percent of the Time Practicing

Since learners are the stars of the play—the main characters on the learning event stage—they get to have most of the lines and action, which means they get to have a lot of time to practice new skills and information. In traditional learning models, teachers typically spend 70 percent of the learning event time teaching skills, and learners spend only 30 percent practicing those skills. As you see yourself more as the director of talented people who want to shine and produce amazing results, you realize that the more they practice, the greater their chance for success when they are on their own. *Learners need to spend 70 percent of the total learning event time practicing the new skills, working with them, and teaching others, while you spend only 30 percent of the time teaching the skills to them* (Figure 1.1).

Create a Continuous Flow of Connections

How can we ensure that everyone brings his or her best to the endeavor? How can we bring out the brilliance in ourselves and in learners as we work toward objectives?

In addition to the 70/30 Principle, another way to rebalance the learning equation is to establish a learner-centered mindset. This is an important



underpinning of a more synergistic style of learning. When you walk through the chapters regarding the use of the ENGAGE Model, you will see how this is put into practice through many conscious choices. You also will see that each of these choices is necessary to create a continuous flow of connections. You want to connect learners to themselves by inspiring and celebrating who they are—their capabilities and contributions. You want to connect them to their purpose and hopes, and their sense of community. You also want to connect them to your content and to its meaning and application. As you work to make these connections, *your* energy fuels *their* energy to embody and embrace your content because of its deeper connection to who they are and what they want to become. You have reinforced and put into language what they know to be true. The cycle is constant, demanding, and energizing. Everyone feels a sense of fulfillment. Powerful relationships form between the teacher and learners and also within the group of learners itself. This is a powerful paradigm for learning, and much of it arises by nurturing a mindset that starts with you—who you are as the teacher and the contribution you bring to your learners—and radiates to how you feel about your learners: your genuine belief that you want them to succeed.

Brilliance Starts with You

Brilliance starts with you, the teacher—your mindset and your investment. Both of these factors are crucial in catalyzing your strengths and those of your learners. Developing your learner-centered mindset, belief in learner success, and commitment to creating learning experiences that support that success are critical, so it is important to invest in yourself as well as your learners. You might think of preparing for learning events as you would prepare for an athletic event such as a marathon, triathlon, or even an Olympic event. Being your healthiest, strongest, most skilled and talented self requires many layers of training and practice. Such a demanding and exciting process begins, like anything else, with a willingness to do the work of learning more about yourself and connecting with or working synergistically with others. In the rest of this chapter we'll explore how you can consciously develop a mindset that supports optimal learning and how you can consciously invest in yourself and your learners to bring out brilliance.

Know Yourself

While it is important that you be the expert in your content, it is perhaps more important that you know, constantly learn about, and accept yourself. Self-awareness is the cornerstone of emotional intelligence and is essential

for authentically growing into your full potential as an individual, a teacher, and a leader. It also is the foundation for connecting authentically with your learners.

REFLECTION: Exercise

KNOWING YOURSELF

In an ideal world, some of the first work you do as a teacher is reflection and self-awareness. If you have done something like this before, that's great—but there is always more to discover. Take the time to think about the following important questions. Write down your answers in a notebook or record them as an audio file. Date your entries and save them. Try to do this exercise at least once a year.

- Who am I?
- What is important to me?
- What are my gifts and strengths?
- What are some areas that need improvement?
- What inspires and motivates me?
- What are my goals? (What do I want to achieve?)
- What are barriers to my goals?
- What are my passions?
- What is my purpose?
- What energizes me?
- What do I need to sustain my passion, my purpose, and my energy?
- What have I done recently that makes me happy?
- How could I do more of that?
- What has become clearer to me after answering these questions?
- How do I best learn?

Connect with Self and Others

The drive for self-awareness is motivated not only by a personal desire for continued learning and growth (which fuels happiness), but also by the knowledge that the more self-aware people are, the more fully they can



connect with others and their experiences. This connection is an expansion of our emotional repertoire and it makes us far more effective as teachers and leaders who help people claim their greatness.

Approve of Yourself

Bill George, professor at Harvard Business School, former chairman and CEO of Medtronic, and author of *True North: Discover Your Authentic Leadership*, says, “The key to self-acceptance is to love yourself unconditionally.” He reminds us that this means acknowledging and accepting our strengths and weaknesses. He further offers, “Loving yourself unconditionally requires self-compassion.” It is “that level of self-compassion [that] enables you to get to the source of your True North and to accept yourself as you are.”⁶ It also is the first level of being able to connect authentically with others, to respect and trust them, to learn from them and empower them, and to support and challenge them.⁷

The statement “I approve of myself” is simple but powerful. It is a statement of self-acceptance. I often ask my students to say it three times before we start learning or applying rigorous material. When we acknowledge fundamental approval of ourselves, we are more accepting of our mistakes as well as our successes. Teachers benefit from self-acceptance, too. So, before you teach a session, you might want to say “I approve of myself” five times. As you increase approval of yourself, others will increase approval of themselves, too. Also, when working with learners who are acting out or having difficulty, self-acceptance makes it possible for you to focus not on yourself but on the learners and how you can help them.

Practice Self-Care

Self-care is all too often the last concern of highly challenged, busy people with enormous responsibilities. It is, however, an important priority. If you are not healthy, restored, and resilient on a regular basis, you will not be able to be present, connect, inspire, or engage as effectively as you want. Caring for yourself enables you to put forward your very best self when you teach.

This is important. Think about it: What do you need so that you can do a better job of taking care of yourself? Perhaps you need to get more sleep, sit down when you eat instead of grabbing something on the go, take a walk in nature, go on mini-vacations, absorb doses of regular inspiration, spend quiet time with family, or reflect on more feedback from valued sources. What do you do to connect and care for yourself or to improve your relation-

ships with others while building your practice as a teacher? How do you inspire yourself or seek inspiration from others to stay fresh and keep learning, growing, and developing?

Take Building Excellence
Assessment Now:
See Resource A.

This would be a great time to take an amazing assessment donated to this book from PCI Learn (www.learningstyles.net) called The Building Excellence Profile. See Resource A in the back of the book to access this valuable and extremely educative assessment.

Value Learners and Invest in Success

Everything you do needs to show that you value your learners, care about them, and believe in their success. This mindset opens them to learning. They feel your caring deeply, and it influences them at a profound level. You can demonstrate that you value them by doing small things like greeting them, remembering and calling them by their name, or reiterating something they told you. You can also show you value them by starting your sessions on time and jumping right in to engage them. All of these things show them that they are important and that there are good, solid reasons for being there. Time is a precious commodity; let learners know that you value their time, their commitment, and their interest in your offering. Maintain this mindset as you craft your content, apply the learning design, and personalize the details. This even applies to scheduling breaks and paying attention to small things such as providing energizing snacks and meals. Most importantly, you communicate your respect by making this learning purposeful and meaningful to the learner. Let's peek into two fictional learners' experiences in two different workshops on the same day.

A Tale of Two Classrooms

Nicole, a participant in a leadership development workshop, wakes up extra early so she can take her dog for a walk and still get to her office to print some documents and pick up an important file. She zooms into class one minute before start time. Nicole looks around the room, finds a tent placard with her name on it and a workbook on the table, and sits down. The speaker, standing at a podium in front of the room, welcomes everyone and facilitates introductions around the room for 20 to 30 minutes. Nicole is thinking, "Why did I rush? I could have slept 15 more minutes and squeezed fresh juice. I could have gotten so much more done back at the office." When introductions end, the facilitator shows the first PowerPoint slide with out-



comes for the day and dives into a presentation of content. She lectures for 20 to 30 minutes, barely slows down to ask if there are any questions, then speeds right back into her talk. Participants listen, go through the workbook, break for lunch, listen to a little more PowerPoint lecture, watch a video or two, and then zoom back to the office to catch up on e-mail.

Charlie, a participant in a leadership development workshop, wakes up extra early so he can have a cup of coffee and take his daughters to daycare before dashing to the office to check on a couple of work-related issues, pick up a file he requested from his assistant, and grab his pre-work assignment. He makes it to class with a minute or two to spare. As he approaches the room, he hears soft music, and when he gets to the door, the teacher is there to welcome him. He extends his hand, thanks Charlie for coming, asks him about his job, and suggests that Charlie choose a place to sit that feels most comfortable. Charlie settles in. The teacher offers a quick overview of the workshop, then challenges the group with a relevant, provocative question: “Does the world need leaders?” When the participants say, “Yes,” the facilitator says, “What are you hoping for as you say ‘yes?’” He then asks participants to brainstorm independently, then take turns writing their top ideas on flip charts placed around the room. When everyone is done, the teacher asks each person to introduce himself and share his brilliant thoughts. The sharing of those thoughts leads to an introduction of the high-impact agenda and outcomes for the day.

Which room would you rather be in? Even though Nicole’s class might feel more familiar and typical, Charlie’s class promises to be a better use of your time and, frankly, feels more appealing. In addition to getting everyone actively involved right away, Charlie’s teacher does many things to show consideration for his learners, to communicate that they are important, and to make them feel engaged. The music is a helpful tool for bringing down the early morning stress level and transitioning into the learning environment. By standing in the doorway, Charlie’s teacher makes it clear that he wants to connect with everyone personally. When you are teaching or training, greeting people at the door is a great opportunity to find out why each learner is taking your class and what is important to that person. This is not just idle conversation; it is vital information for you to keep in mind and use to make your prepared content meaningful and to engage learners who might need a little special attention. Taking the time to connect personally is a valuable way of showing that this learning event is about the learner, that you care, and that you want the experience to be meaningful to each individual. Even a small thing like letting participants choose their own seat can make a big difference. It may seem minor, but it is an act that gives the learner power. Feeling that

People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

we have power is a huge motivating factor in making the effort to learn.

Let your learners know that you value them, their time, and their commitment to being there by getting them involved early in relevant work and by focusing on them. Saying it is one thing; doing it is another.

REFLECTION: Exercise

THINK BACK/THINK AHEAD

- Think of the last class/meeting you attended that engaged you immediately. What did the manager or teacher do to fire you up?
- What class/meeting are you about to lead? How could you energize, focus, and engage people early on?

Know Your Learners

Who are your learners? What do they bring to the table? What do they know that you don't? How are you connecting with them based on what you know about them and what they need and want personally and professionally? What inspires and drives them? What are their goals? What is their passion and purpose? What transformation do they want to take place? What do they have to do to learn and put the learning into practice? There is no better way to know your learners than to ask them questions and listen to their ideas throughout the learning event. You can do this during formal and informal connections or through a designed activity or a spontaneous moment at the beverage table.

Leverage the Power of Stories

Tell your stories. It will help people remember important concepts. Recently, I went to hear Kevin Freiberg speak on leadership. Kevin is a coach, speaker, and coauthor with his wife, Jackie, of three best-sellers, including *Boom! 7 Choices for Blowing the Doors Off Business-As-Usual*. One of Kevin's key



points in his talk was that it is important to act on your values. I might not have remembered that point if Kevin hadn't told a moving personal story about why he made the decision to do less traveling and stay home and do more writing. Kevin shared that he was standing at the door of his house with his suitcase, saying good-bye to his family, when his son looked up at him and said, "Dad, if you value your family, why are you always leaving?" *That I remember!* And because I remember that story, I also remember to live my stated value of the importance of my family.

Encourage participants to tell their stories, to talk about what is important to them, to open themselves up to learning. Create an environment that feels safe and builds trust. Listen to their stories. Build in exercises and time for learners to do the talking, sharing, and teaching. Listening is one of the most important skills for teachers to develop.

Connect Learners to Build a Community of Practice

Kevin Small, President of ResultSource, a leader in book marketing, is one of my favorite people. I call Kevin "The Great Connector" because he really is. He really is the results source! He has helped authors such as John Maxwell, Chip and Dan Heath, Marcus Buckingham, Ken Blanchard, Keith Ferrazzi, and others make their books best-sellers, which helped them achieve other goals. When you are with Kevin and he introduces you to someone, he has an amazing ability to call attention to the strengths and talents of both of you, to make you feel that you are uniquely special and that there will be a magical synergy from this connection that will help you both. As a teacher, you can leverage the impact of connections in your learning situations by showcasing or calling out the uniqueness and talents of all participants and by connecting them to each other. You can help people see that to achieve their life's purpose they need others with talents, knowledge, and connections that are different from their own.

Be Flexible

Great teachers are connected to what is going on around them and flexible while still being purposeful. Although you plan, sometimes you have to be willing to change what you are doing. Once I was working with managers at a large banking organization in the throes of a buyout. The announcement of the buyout came at the beginning of a two-day session I was teaching. Naturally, everyone was concerned with what the buyout was going to mean personally and professionally. While I had been planning to teach participants how to work with their direct reports, in view of the announcement I knew I had to change the focus of my content. Instead, I taught my participants

how to make sure they got what they needed in their new positions, and they were right there with me. This willingness to be flexible validated their concerns, helped me connect to them authentically, and made the topic and skills relevant to them.

Last summer, I facilitated a leadership initiative for a branch of the U.S. military. I noticed that one participant seemed particularly distracted and disengaged. He asked to speak to me during a break. I learned that not only had he lost a number of friends in Iraq, but also his wife at home was gravely ill. He confessed that he was trying to do his best to listen and participate, but it was difficult. After listening to his story, I realized it was likely that many other participants were similarly preoccupied. I subtly changed the way I taught the rest of the workshop. By tweaking my language to acknowledge and appreciate the life and death situations this soldier was trying to come to terms with, allowing more time for reflection, and creating respectful ways to connect him with others in the class, I made it more meaningful for him and others to be there.

Read the Room

Everything you do as a teacher can open learners to their own brilliance or it can do the opposite—stifle it. Your demeanor, facial expressions, words, tone, body language, and energy all send messages that can either open people up or shut them down. You can see it as you look around the room. Do you see smiles and sparkling eyes, intent expressions eager for learning? Are people sitting up, leaning forward, maybe on the edge of their seats? Or are they frowning, slumping, checking the time, squirming, and uncomfortable? Do you see joy and enthusiasm? Do you hear the noise of many interacting voices working out solutions and supporting each other, and the quiet of creative energy-exploring possibilities? If so, you will know that you are inspiring the desired outcome, your energy is infectious, and your minute-by-minute choices are paying off. If not, you probably need to change things up. This might mean changing the energy in the room by giving everyone a chance to physically get up and move around. Or maybe you need to interject a little humor or give clearer direction.

Create a Safe Place

For an optimal learning environment, it is imperative to create a protected space where people feel comfortable opening up and grappling with tough concepts. When they feel emotionally safe, they will feel that it is okay to show not just what they do know, but also what they don't know, which will make them more open to learning. As people really be-



lieve you care, they will engage at a higher level, and they will rise to meet your expectations.

One way to do this is to show your own vulnerability—to be open about your own mistakes. When teaching how to facilitate virtually, I always tell stories of a wide range of funny mistakes that I made early in my teaching career. This helps people laugh and relax as they see that I have lived and learned by making mistakes.

Be conscious of the language you use to respond to questions or to incorrect answers. Always give learners the opening to try again, to work a little harder to make a connection. Do as much as you can to facilitate their aha moments and to help them be smart.

Joining participants by being with them in the room rather than setting yourself apart is a great way to engender a feeling of safety. This might mean you sit down with them to be part of an exercise, walk around the room as you talk rather than standing behind a podium, and notice if you tend to speak to one side of the room more than another, unconsciously making the people on the other side feel left out. When learners know they are safe, it frees the whole brain and body to learn rather than expending energy worrying or feeling threatened by what the teacher might say or do.

It's not about how smart they are; it's about *how* they are smart.

When you build safety or support for learning into the framework of your learning design, you and everyone else model it. A former student of mine, Gregg, teaches business writing at the college level and in corporate learning environments. No matter where he is teaching or who the participants are, the defining principles and framework for creating a respectful, trusting, learner-supportive writing community are the same.

Inspired by an objective or a writing craft skill, Gregg's learners participate in a meticulously structured class. His warm-up exercise is designed to make everyone feel competent right away. Many people may feel vulnerable and may be afraid of writing. They think they aren't good enough, and they don't want to be seen as incompetent in such a concrete way. (Does anyone?) The first exercise opens everyone up, makes them feel safe, and helps them connect with what they do know. After this exercise, when they are feeling more confident, they write. Then, when everyone is finished, anyone who chooses to do so reads his or her work aloud. Gregg explains that this part is just as important as the writing. Each reading is followed by feedback, so each participant is responsible for listening authentically. During feedback, it is the job of the students to provide two very important elements: appreciation and positive comments. Gregg tells participants that they can always say, "Thank you for that." He encourages this by modeling

it himself for every reader. He models positive feedback by identifying specific words, phrases, or sentences he likes or thinks of as memorable. He also models very specific positive comments, such as “You got your point across quickly and clearly,” or “I felt the importance of your request,” or “I liked the way you directly asked your team for support.” He is clear about zero tolerance for negative comments and criticism. Gregg believes that focusing the learners’ attention on the positive things they do engenders more of that skilled behavior. In some settings he facilitates rounds of feedback in response to the question “What could be improved?” The session always ends with what Gregg calls “excessive gratitude” (what I call celebration). He thanks them for their generous mutual support, reminds them of their hard work, and lauds them for bringing out the best in themselves and others.

It is through the vehicle of this clear framework and its ground rules that Gregg creates a safe place—an open learning environment where everyone is more receptive and can take risks, stretch, and work hard without fear of being shut down. It doesn’t take long for his students to take the lead in the learning process—writing, showing appreciation, giving positive feedback, building their strengths, and feeling their brilliance.

Recognize That People Want to Learn

It doesn’t take much to facilitate or even revive the natural desire to learn and grow. It does, however, take an incredibly generous and courageous heart, less desire for self-importance and ego satisfaction, and a genuine display of belief in a learner’s ability to arrive at the knowledge. Your ability to ask for and ignite people’s internal motivation and love of learning leverages years of brain-based and learning research and keeps the energy high for you and your learners.

Even though people crave the opportunity to be smart, unleash their talent, and obtain powerful information and new skills, barriers sometimes stand in the way. We are complex individuals with unique life experiences, hang-ups, and daily worries. We have different learning preferences we often aren’t even aware of, and we have past learning experiences that may have turned us off. Learners bring all of that with them to your learning sessions. As you know, there are people who seem to be able to learn any way you share information, and others who seem to be unable to focus, learn, or retain anything. Sometimes, these learners act out in ways that can be challenging. What is important for all of us to realize is that there are myriad reasons for reluctance and skepticism, and there are many effective strategies for dealing with those unique challenges.



Although each learner comes to your session with a different history, it is imperative that you assume they all want to learn. Certainly, some come to new learning opportunities with zeal and confidence. Others come with pessimistic attitudes, old baggage, new stresses, and real pressures. Their struggles, failures, and negative experiences from the past cast a shadow and make them closed to new learning. They may be doubtful and insecure about their success or the value of the experience for many reasons, including their own insecurity about their abilities. Sometimes a teacher can trigger memories, even mental “tapes” of bad experiences that are difficult for the learner to overcome alone. In one of my sessions, when I pulled aside a particularly belligerent woman to ask her what was going on, she thought for a moment, then said that I reminded her of her mother, and she was not going to let me “make her do anything again!” Once the young woman heard herself say that aloud, we laughed, and she was able to put her issue with her mother aside and fully focus on the class.

In another session, I became aware of a man who seemed to be glaring at me for a long while. When I asked him what was going on, he told me he didn’t know what to do in the assigned activity. What I was interpreting as anger or reluctance to get involved was actually a feeling of frustration and worry about being held accountable for something he missed. Although I had given some direction and others were working, he felt lost. I hadn’t been specific enough for him. He needed more step-by-step instruction. Once I gave it to him and walked him through the first part, he relaxed and stepped into the flow of the lesson. This same young man became one of the people who recorded a testimonial about the power of the content and course at the end of the day!

By the time children reach second grade, many have already learned to doubt their abilities and talents. They’ve experienced adults who have to be right and who want to win and be superior. This attitude is unproductive and is more about power and ego than learning. Not only does it dampen openness to learning, sometimes it shuts it right down. Learners affected by this approach often do what a turtle does—recess into a protective shell or try to hide or be invisible. They are afraid to stand out for fear of being not good enough. Because of their lack of confidence, they try to figure out what the teacher is looking for rather than think for themselves. Thankfully, there are many great teachers who restore a learner’s confidence and who reignite the trust, openness, and the love of learning that many of us safely had in preschool. Great teachers want learners to think and to feel. They make it safe to step out of comfort zones and take

the risks necessary to learn. Although some learners display a negative attitude or are rude, angry, uncooperative, or downright resentful about being in class, it usually is to cover up their own insecurity. It is possible to turn all those barriers around and help the learner feel at ease and open to learning.

Assume Positive Intention

Often, people act out and resist learning because of something going on in their lives outside the classroom. They may feel powerless in the face of change, or afraid of making yet another mistake. They may have had a serious fight with a spouse or family member, or they may be worried about losing their job. They may be on a diet, they may have low blood sugar and feel edgy, or perhaps they are worried about making financial ends meet.

It is essential to assume positive intention on the part of every learner. Regardless of the signs a student may be giving you that he or she is closed to learning, you need to believe that, underneath, there is a genuine desire to learn. When a learner's behaviors and intentions are not in sync, you can bring them into alignment by building trust that you sincerely want the learner to be successful, not just in your learning session but also in life. If you communicate this over and over again, the student will eventually believe you and open up.

Help People Be Smart

Whether your learners are talkative, angry, aggressive, inconsiderate, know-it-all, quiet, overly sensitive, or trying to be funny, there are behavior management strategies that might help you. Interestingly, I've found that some of my most challenging learners, if handled with grace, honesty, and sincerity, have become some of my greatest proponents and even lifelong friends. Your best approach is a respectful, honest, caring one. By asking, "Would it be okay if I share something I have noticed?" and really listening to the response, you give that person a voice, and you learn as well as teach.

As you read the following suggestions, remember that your goal is to help everyone be successful and have an optimal learning experience. Since everyone is different, you and your learners will benefit from a diverse repertoire of strategies and approaches.

Some specific types of challenges you might encounter are situations where someone:



- Can't stop talking
- Can't seem to talk
- Tells you everything about themselves
- Name-drops
- Seems apathetic, lazy, bored, or uninterested
- Tells a joke a minute
- Acts stressed
- Seems chemically dependent
- Acts like a know-it-all
- Seems to dislike you before they even know you

I am a firm believer that people are doing the best they can on any given day. Few people wake up and think, “I am going to be a lousy learner and disrupt the class (or meeting) today.” The faster we realize that, and truly believe that someone’s acting out has nothing to do with us, the faster we go down the learner’s path to seek a mutually beneficial solution versus letting someone’s behavior disrupt the learning experience. By assuming positive intent and asking yourself, “Why might a rational person be acting this way?” you move to a more productive place—a place of generosity and problem solving.

Being a respectful, sensitive teacher doesn’t mean that you have to become everyone’s counselor, psychologist, or social worker. However, as I said previously, you will be a stronger, more effective, and likely happier teacher if you choose to work with all learners rather than entering into a contentious battle or ignoring them. To do this, you will want to be aware of your inner judge or critic. Be sure you are reminding yourself that you are okay and that you approve of yourself. If you are positive with yourself, you can engender that behavior with your students.

Address the Cause

Often we assume that we know why someone is doing what we observe, and that may cause us to label the person versus objectively finding out what is going on. People can’t read minds. (I get myself into trouble constantly because I forget this and think I can!) The faster you move toward the person and ask him what his observable behavior means, the faster you can address what is wrong. Remember to celebrate individuality and be curious about the person and his world versus being annoyed.

Build Self-Esteem

People who don't like themselves much may have difficulty enjoying and being open to situations that could prove them right. They may have deep fear of not being "good enough," and this fear shows up as some of the behaviors mentioned earlier. They may be approval seekers or perfectionists who are hard on themselves. Their anger and disappointment may show up as a lack of faith in anything that might help them be successful. As you notice them, make them feel important and weave their ideas, answers, and suggestions into the learning session. You can be the one who helps them alter their ingrained belief that they just aren't good enough and helps them realize that they really are okay. Your patience, assumption of positive intention, and confidence building can help them relax into the experience so they can hear their own ideas and experience what it is like for someone to notice them because of their gifts. This encourages them to contribute at their highest level.

Open a Trust Fund

Many reasons exist for why a learner acts bored or positions himself as "know-it-all," contrarian, or the resident comedian. Subliminally, this person may have a fear of being wrong or looking stupid. They want to know that they can trust you to not make them feel worse than they already feel about themselves and their capabilities, and that it is safe to reveal their truths. To build this trust, support learners by setting them up to win with your great content, models, and materials and by giving directions that are concise and actionable. Another way to ensure a safer learning environment is to stick with them until their response is right and they know they have grasped the new concept. This means you ask them their rationale and help move them to the correct response rather than just moving to another person for the right answer. To build trust, you need to be competent, sincere, and authentic, and validate who they really are.

Create Opportunities for Success

To create a community of learners, give everyone the chance to achieve early success in front of their peers. Sometimes learners hold back for fear of being wrong and looking stupid in front of others. They live a self-fulfilling prophecy by living out other people's expectations instead of reaching for their own aspirations. In the past, they may have always gotten away with being "good enough," but subconsciously they know they could do better. You can be the one—the change agent—who breaks their pattern of behavior and empowers them to take greater risks. By using your power as a teacher and starting with



simple questions that generate discussion and help learners look intelligent in front of their peers, you can challenge them to tap into their innate brainpower and succeed at more difficult situations that may arise later on.

Focus on What You Can Control

As I've said earlier, learners come to learning sessions with all of their life experiences. Possibly you have heard some of their personal stories and been humbled by the kinds of difficulties they are dealing with. Current events in all aspects of our lives influence attitude and behavior when we're trying to learn. It's important to care, but the fact remains that you can't control what is going on outside your sphere of influence. Trying to do so would be overwhelming and unproductive.

I believe you can help learners who are acting out or preoccupied by focusing on what you *can* control—the immediate learning experience. You can control the flow, content, and learning design. If everyone is distracted and listless, there is a good chance you need to change things up. Try another way of stating what you just said or asking them to do an activity. Get people up to the flip chart or the computers and ask them to generate three questions about what you are teaching. Help them release some of their angst and refocus by taking immediate action. Success breeds success. The faster you show people how much they can learn, the faster they want to learn more.

Be the Visible Patrol

What do you do if you see a police car when you are driving? You check the speedometer, look around you, and make sure you are obeying the laws. Perhaps you slow down, make sure you use your turn signals, and generously let cars change lanes in front of you. You can be a police car in your meeting or class and have the same influence. Without saying anything, you can reengage learners while minimizing disruptive behaviors such as checking smartphones, talking, multitasking, and avoiding the assignment. By moving closer to someone checking e-mail or standing right next to two people not involved in the group activity, you can put them on high alert, and that alone may stop the behavior and reengage the learner(s).

Change Their State

To reduce resistance to learning, sometimes you just have to change what I call a person's "state." Ask people to stand up, stretch, breathe, drink a glass of water, get a snack, listen to a song, or make a subliminal affirmation, such as "I can learn _____."

All of these strategies break the wall of emotion and address physical limitations that may be blocking learning. When you fundamentally value the individual and respect where they are in their life at the moment, you empower them to show up as the person they would like to be and help them actualize their greatest potential.

Flip Your Focus

When I went through training to become a counselor, one of my instructors taught me to flip my focus from myself to my patient. This has been a valuable strategy for me that I have remembered and used throughout my career. When I think, “He hates me,” I am making his behavior about me. When I get really clear about the essence of my feeling and flip my focus or change my perspective to “He hates himself” or “He seems to be angry—what might have made him hate the world right now?” this shifts my perspective to focusing on the patient, or on my learner. Instead of thinking, “What a pain,” I can try to understand what might have made him so angry or why he might hate himself, and I can focus on how to help him understand it so he can move on. This really works. If I say to myself, “She thinks I am not too smart,” I am making someone else’s behavior about me. If I flip my focus to “She doesn’t think she is very smart,” I can focus on finding ways to help her believe in her own intelligence.

Another strategy for flipping your focus and changing your perspective to build better relationships and better results comes from the book *You’re Never Upset for the Reason You Think* by Paul and Layne Cutright.⁸ When you are upset with a learner, you often think it is about them and their behavior. Paul and Layne share that you can take the emotional charge out of the upset by focusing on *your* reactions and figuring out what this person triggered in you. Early in my training career at The Ken Blanchard Companies, I went to Clorox to do a training with a dynamic, highly educated group of brand managers. Just thinking about their Ivy League degrees while flying there made me a bit nervous about whether I was good enough to be teaching them. To overcome my insecurity, I led with my ego, wanting to impress them with how much I knew and to show them how smart I was. Needless to say, this alienated them. Thankfully, I realized that *they* weren’t the challenge, *I* was. Instead of assuming positive intention on their part, I assumed negative judgment. When I flipped my perspective from “I want them to see me as smart” to “I want them to be smart,” I got my ego out of the way and began to listen to just how brilliant they were, and the rest of the session opened up to invite everyone’s learning.



Help Learners Find Their Voice

Helping learners feel brilliant and express their unique thoughts is a challenge for even the most talented teacher. Success can depend on a range of incredibly diverse variables that might include what the participant ate that day, what's going on at home or in their minds, their moods, how far behind they are in their work, how satisfied or dissatisfied they are with their job, how stressed or calm they are, how interested they are in your topic, and what's going on in the world.

As you take on the challenge of being an architect of learning, remember that whether your learners are in a meeting, a workshop, or in an online class, people like to feel brilliant. They love to learn, speak knowledgeably about something new, and wrestle with it until it becomes theirs. Brilliant feelings transfer to taking on greater learning risks, exploration, and innovative thinking.

REFLECTION: Review

BRING OUT BRILLIANCE

- Rebalance the Learning Equation: The 70/30 Principle
- Create a Continuous Flow of Connections
- Brilliance Starts with You
 - Know Yourself
 - Connect with Self and Others
 - Approve of Yourself
 - Practice Self-Care
- Value Learners and Invest in Success
 - Know Your Learners
 - Leverage the Power of Stories
 - Connect Learners to Build a Community of Practice
 - Be Flexible

(Continued)

- Read the Room
- Create a Safe Place
- Recognize That People Want to Learn
- Assume Positive Intention
- Help People Be Smart
 - Address the Cause
 - Build Self-Esteem
 - Open a Trust Fund
 - Create Opportunities for Success
 - Focus on What You *Can* Control
 - Be the Visible Patrol
 - Change Their State
 - Flip Your Focus
- Help Learners Find Their Voice

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