
AFTERWORD

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What a journey! In reading this new edition of the now-classic text, *The Six Disciplines of Breakthrough Learning*, I imagine us, as readers, having been guided through a challenging, transformational journey. Like a combination of Boot Camp, Outward Bound, Consciousness Raising, and a Harvard Business School Executive Retreat; we've been given all the tools and insights we need to transform our workplace learning practices.

Roy Pollock, Andy Jefferson, and Cal Wick have provided a proven conceptual structure—the 6Ds—as a foundation. We've been shown how the 6Ds approach works in real organizations. We've been given practical tools that have been refined and updated. We've been privy to one of the best compilations of industry wisdom ever assembled in one book. We've been read the riot act, heard the gospel truth, and made to wonder why so many of us are failing on the fundamentals. This book lays it out for us, if only we have the guts and perseverance to do the right thing.

My afterword is intended to be part campfire, part sermon, and part call to action.

I've been a learning consultant for the better part of two decades. My work has focused on compiling research from the world's preeminent scientific journals on learning, memory, and instruction—and then using the wisdom I've gained in my consulting work. Pollock, Jefferson, and Wick come at workplace learning from a different place—and yet, their work

is complementary to the scientific research—and indispensable in its own right. Research and practice must work together for our profession to capitalize on the significant investments we make.

Our field—the workplace learning field—is in the middle of a transformation. It’s a slow transformation, so we may not even recognize it as it happens, but the fundamentals are changing because of four distinct vectors.

First, the science of learning has begun to coalesce around a few fundamental learning factors. From my *Decisive Dozen*, to Ruth Clark’s compendium of books, to the recently published book *Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning*, the research base is strong enough to suggest fundamentals that must be followed. These include realistic practice set in real work contexts, learning events spaced over time, and supporting learners in developing appropriate mental models. Where traditional training tends to focus on content delivery, research-aligned training teaches fewer concepts, but enables the most important concepts to be understood, remembered, and readied for real-world application.

The second force of change is the focus on performance—as opposed to learning delivery. This meme has been bubbling up for at least three decades, but it’s begun to hit a tipping point. More and more organizations are learning how to make this happen. More learning departments care about performance. Pollock, Jefferson, and Wick are among the strongest advocates in this vector, as should be obvious from reading this book.

The third force is technology, particularly digital technology that intimately connects with learners/performers—in ways that go well beyond standard e-learning. The technologies that matter are those that help us reach learners when they’re ready and when relevant contextual cues are visible and actionable. Performance support tools are part of this, but only a part. Mechanisms like subscription learning (short nuggets of interactions threaded over time), integrated gamification (game elements utilized without gaminess), and performance coaching tools will give rise to a learning ecosystem that feels more intimate than what we’ve experienced in the past.

The fourth force really derives from the same well of wisdom as the first force—from psychological science. I call this fourth force “triggering,” although researchers use more formidable terminology. Triggering is based on the reality that humans are more reactive than they are proactive. In fact, our working memories are almost always under the influence, if not control, of the environmental cues we encounter. Here are some examples: When we eat our food on smaller plates, we eat less. The small plates trigger

us to think we're getting more food. When we drive, narrower roads make us drive more slowly. When we shop, subtle upselling triggers us to buy, end caps make us consider additional purchases, "Sale!" stickers prompt us to buy things we might not otherwise.

The truth is that more and more of our daily lives are being triggered by others. Advertisers, online news outlets, political parties, websites, mobile apps—they are all learning how to capture our attention through cues. Of course, triggering is just a fact of the universe. It's not good or bad. Our human cognitive architecture is what it is—it's how we use this architecture that makes the difference. We in the learning space can use triggering to support our learners in learning—and performing. Indeed, it will be in partnership with technology that triggering will have its most power.

When these four forces come together—learning science, a performance focus, intimate technology, and triggering—we as workplace learning professionals will be much more effective than we are now. But here's a secret—you don't have to wait to start. You can begin to make big improvements today. Use the 6Ds as your meta-structure. Then incorporate wisdom from psychological science, much of which is already baked into 6Ds thinking. Finally, look for ways to support your efforts with technology that connects with your learners/performers—in terms of both learning and performance.

Of course, you will have to deal with one sticky wicket. The future of workplace learning and performance is imbued with new paradigms—new paradigms that will challenge old mental models and traditional ways of doing things. In some organizations, it's going to be a bloody mess. Resistance will be everywhere!

To be successful, you'll have to nurture a change management attitude within yourself and your colleagues. There's much to learn about how to champion change—certainly too much to detail in this space. Let me highlight a couple of points here. First, gather allies. Change takes time and perseverance. You'll need both ideational and social support. Change champions need others—not only to help get things done, but also to come up with innovations and to strengthen ideas and initiatives through reality-checking. Perhaps most often ignored is the importance of others in maintaining our resolve. We really do need each other—no more so than when we're slogging through the long journey of change.

Second, don't feel you need to reach nirvana all at once. Perfection is a fantasy world! Do what you can do now and prepare your stakeholders for changes that will come. The best way to do this is through "stealth messaging"—doing little things within our normal practices that send a

message about what is important. This book highlights a number of ways to utilize stealth messages. For example, when people come to you asking you and your team to build a training course, don't forget to ask about other factors that are at play. When people are framing the finish line as the end-of-session smile sheet, remind them that the real goal is performance. Proselytizing can be counterproductive because it heightens mental filters and can stiffen resistance. Gently educate your stakeholders every once in a while, but don't rely on persuasive arguments. You're better off incorporating stealth messages within your practices.

Above all, remember that helping people learn and perform is a noble and worthy cause. We should hold that in our hearts. The cold logic of helping our organizations is a truism, but we humans often need more—more to be inspired, more to persevere, more to work cooperatively with each other, more to be innovative, more to exert our iron will to drive for change and improvement. In the final analysis, we are helping people in the work that we do.

The next step is yours.