How to Create an Accelerated Learning Experience

1. Start with Pre-Work

The use of pre-work helps to prepare and focus participants on the learning. A.L. incorporates all learning styles into the design of the course. There are learners who are more introverted and reflexive and the pre-work is their opportunity to prepare for the course so that they can be effective participants. Pre-work includes:

- Articles that will be referenced and/or are relevant to the course.
- Interactive activities designed to promote feedback during the course. This includes having them write down stories that directly relate to the course content that they can share with other participants, feedback on what they want to learn during the course and explaining the goals of the course in greater detail.

2. Design the Classroom with Purpose

Learning starts the minute a participant walks through the door. The set-up of the room has an enormous impact on helping to centre the participant in the space. Mood is created through music, light, chair set ups and posters. When a participant walks into the classroom and sees posters on the wall, their natural reaction (especially for visual learners) is to look at the posters and think about them. The posters have positive messages that are designed to engage the participant to start thinking and should not be directly related to the learning but contain more subtle messages that the course wants to convey. The posters and set up of the space before the course starts help to put participants in the 'now' and focus them in the classroom and away from the hundreds of distractions that are going on outside of the classroom. Here are examples of posters that are used in the classroom:

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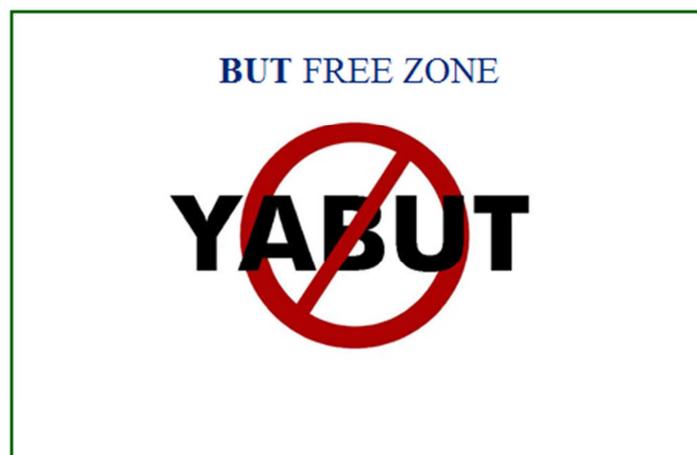
Use of music. Different types of music create different moods. Classical music is very effective for reflexive exercises.   More upbeat music can create different themes.   For instance, walking in to pop songs with upbeat messages (i.e. *Happy* by Pharrell, *Walking on Sunshine* by Katrina and the Waves, etc.) will have people moving their heads to the beat of the music and immediately set their mood. For auditory learners, using music helps centre them in space the same way posters help centre visual learners.

How the room is set up also has a direct impact on the learner. A room that is set up 'cabaret-style' with round tables creates a sharing information and knowledge with a small group. 'Classroom' style set up with a screen and podium in the front of the room with rows of chairs. This set-up designates a lecture-style workshop where knowledge is transferred in a one way direction from the facilitator/teacher to the participant. Chairs set up in a circle away from the projector and screen indicates that a group of equals where knowledge is shared.   Classrooms

can be set up one way (i.e. chairs in a circle) to start a workshop and then changed to 'another for learning effect as well.

3. Use of Games and Simulations in the course design

We learn in moments of engagement. As discussed earlier, engagement is triggered by feelings. More than intellectual, learning is emotional. A course designed using accelerated learning is very interactive and experiential. It utilizes games, simulations and learning so that participants can *apply* their learning. At a very high level, each learning section breaks down the following way:

- Game or activity
- Debrief using open ended questions
- Lecture with tie-in to the activity or game
- Application through simulation or case study
- Feedback from participants with questions

How learners might look during an accelerated learning workshop

4. Post learning

Our personal motto of learning is 'use it or lose it'. All good course design should incorporate post-workshop application of the knowledge.   There are four elements of post-learning:

- **Planning** on how to apply what they have learned to a real world situation
- **Responsibility** for applying what they have learned
- **Accountability** to somebody for applying
- **Measuring** to ensure that they are applying the learning directly.

At the end of every course, participants should be asked to find either one or two partners. They should individually create a detailed SMART plan, read it back to their partner(s) for feedback and arrange a time and date after the course (usually within 3-5 weeks) to check in with their partners to both debrief how their plans are going and share feedback to help each other.   As mentioned earlier, learning comes from doing the work itself.

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Example of Pre-Work from the Flexible Thinker®

The Flexible Thinker® workshop is designed to:

☒ Expand your thinking in order to make important decisions, often under pressure, that can affect both you and your company's future;

☒ Communicate in a way that builds on ideas instead of negating them;

☒ Build an innovative team that can work effectively under pressure;

☒ Find opportunities on the spot where there only seem to be problems;

☒ Create new ideas and communicate them with others;

☒ Embrace change instead of fearing it in order to meet the challenges of a world in constant transition;

☒ Deal with difficult issues and people.

Elements of this program are based on improvisation

Why improvisation? In improvisation, you are placed in a situation where you have to create something out of nothing and make decisions under pressure. You have nothing to rely on but a small group of people. To make matters worse, you must deal with a wider group of people who will throw every obstacle in your way. Sound familiar?!?

There are some things you need to know about this course:

- This classroom is a safe environment. There are no right or wrong answers or mistakes. You are here to learn and in order to learn you have to risk without fear of negative consequences.

- Although this course uses a workbook and there are plenty of "left-brain" exercises, many areas of this course are experiential and you will be expected to participate in "right-brain" exercises with other people. In other words, you will be doing some "improvisation". By doing these exercises, you will not only have the opportunity to use both sides of your brain but expand your own comfort zone in a way that allows you to both learn and grow. This offers you the opportunity to practice what you are learning under the type of pressure circumstances you may face at work.

Above all, this course is designed to be practical — both at work and at home. After completing the course, you will be able to apply what you have learned immediately to help you work with others to get the most out of any situation you may face.

In order to fully maximize your involvement in the course, please take a few moments and fill out this two part pre-workshop assignment. This prework will be used extensively in the workshop. So, after you complete it, save it and bring it to the class with you.

Thank you for taking *The Flexible Thinker*® and we look forward to meeting you soon.

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PART 1: **A Challenge to Flexibility. To be completed for workshop.**

A. Please describe a challenge or situation you are facing that you would like to use these tools to resolve during Day 1 of the course. This Flexible Thinker® challenge should be work related, although it does not have to be. During the day of the event, you are also free to switch challenges if you find a resolution to the challenge you came to the class to answer.

> *Note: You will be sharing this challenge throughout the course with various class participants. Please make the challenge as general as possible and include only enough personal information as you feel comfortable discussing with other people.*

Some examples of Flexible Thinker® challenges are:

Our turnover time for projects is currently four days. However, with our workload increasing we need to be able to decrease our turnaround time to two days or we will keep falling behind.

Our team has a difficult time adjusting to changes. Instead of focusing on meeting the problem head-on and listening to new ideas, people just point fingers at each other and new ideas are discouraged and ridiculed.

I have to create a very detailed report in order to give our clients a variety of information about their accounts. There is no software system currently on the market that can accomplish this, so I need to develop a new application in order to meet that demand.

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My challenge is:

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B.   Please describe in detail a creative or successful story that happened in your life. This event does not have to be work related and should be something that you are proud of accomplishing. As part of the story, describe the obstacles that you had to overcome in order to accomplish your goal.

Some examples of creative/successful stories are:

We were facing a tight deadline and had to create Z when at the 11th hour one of our most critical machines went down. We didn't have time to call for repairs and had to figure out a way to either fix that machine ourselves or find an alternative way to get the work done. I looked at the process that we used and the other machines and, along with some of my colleagues, we were able to reconfigure one of the other machines to by-pass the one that was down. This allowed us to get the job done on time.

I was trying to get a job with X company and had been trying to contact the manager with very little luck. I called over and over again, but the person wouldn't return my calls. I talked to this person's assistant and knew that first thing in the morning they read the Financial Post. I then went to a friend of mine who was a graphic artist and created a fake copy of the Financial Post with a story about myself. I then woke up very early, snuck into where they drop off the Post and replaced their copy with my doctored one. Later that morning the person called me and said that they had just finished reading an article about me and would I like to come in for an interview. I did and got the job.

My daughter's teacher told me that she was behind the other kids in reading and writing. I had tried different ways of working with her to get her reading up to the level of the rest of class, but nothing seemed to be working. My daughter loves being read to at bedtime so I thought that instead of reading her a story we could make one up together. She liked the idea and after we made up a story I told her, "Wouldn't it be fun to write our own book together." I had her write down the story and, together, we went downstairs to the computer, picked pictures and wrote the story. We had several copies made and we sent them to family members and friends. My daughter was so pleased with herself that she took the book to school to show her teacher. After that, my daughter wanted to write more books and she started writing down stories in a small notebook. By the end of the year, she was reading at a grade above her class.

I decided to coach my son's hockey team. There were a lot of problems with the team and the guy who used to coach them. The kids weren't having any fun and the team was in last place. When I took over, I decided to coach hockey the way I like to play it, make it fun. The kids really responded and not only did we have an enormous amount of fun, but our team won their division.

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My most creative/successful story is:

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SMART Plan Partnership Agreement

SMART Plan for _____

1.0 Name and Contact of Partners.

My Partner(s) is: _____   _____

Contact info: _____   _____

                         _____   _____

The intent of this Agreement is to outline an agreement regarding _____

2.0 My SPECIFIC Plan is:

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3.0 MEASUREMENT of my progress:

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4.0 The ACTIONS I can REALISTICALLY take over the next 3-5 weeks to help achieve my goal are:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

5.0 DATE AND TIME   I will follow up with my partner(s):

_____

    5.1 Method (i.e. e-mail, phone, in person, etc.) for follow up:

    _____

    5.2 Location/Phone Number for follow up (if necessary):

    _____