



# A WEEK IN *Learning*

## ARTICLE

### ADULT LEARNING - NOT KID STUFF!

Lane Schonour, Senior Vice President, Learning & Development

I recently attended a conference where I led a learning session for many of our Goodwill colleagues from across the country. I was invited to speak because a large (and growing!) number of Goodwill agencies are dedicating resources to growing their Learning and Development (L&D) efforts. I was proud to share some of the tools we've built here in Phoenix over the last several years. As I thought about how to organize my thoughts, I kept thinking about how unique the learning needs of Adults are compared to younger, more traditional "students".

A researcher named Malcolm Knowles is credited with producing the most complete list of specific characteristics and experiences that adults bring to the learning environment. As we work together at Goodwill, all of us will find ourselves in a position to be a teacher of some kind. For part of my presentation, I took Knowles' original ideas, updated them a bit, and (hopefully) added some humor. I prepared the list below as a handout and titled it "Things Adult Learners Would Like You To Know". I hope you find it both enjoyable – and helpful. Remember that your L&D team is always available to work with you whenever you have the desire or opportunity to become a teacher!

#### ***Things Adult Learners Would Like You To Know***

##### **I Need To Drive!**

Adult learners are generally self-directed, meaning they prefer to take more responsibility for their learning. Unlike children who are largely dependent on teachers to guide their education, adults often seek out learning opportunities independently and set their own learning goals.

##### **I've Seen (and Done) A Lot!**

Adults bring a wealth of personal and professional experience to the learning environment. These experiences serve as a rich resource for learning and are often tapped into during the educational process, especially in discussions, problem-solving exercises, and practical applications.

##### **I'll Let You Know When It's A Good Time.**

Adult learners are usually ready to learn things they feel they need to know. Their learning is often oriented toward solving specific problems or fulfilling particular roles in their personal or professional lives.



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-Lane Schonour

### **This Better Help Right Away.**

Adults are motivated to learn to the extent that they perceive that it will help them perform tasks or solve problems in their life. Their learning is often more application-centered than theory-centered.

### **I'm Mostly Doing This For Me.**

While external factors like promotions or grades might be motivators, adults are mostly driven by internal factors such as increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, and quality of life.

### **This Had Better Make Sense.**

Adult learners value practicality and utility. They are more likely to be engaged when they can see the immediate usefulness and applicability of what they are learning.

### **We Need To Do This Together.**

Adults wish to be treated as equals and value a learning environment where their opinions are respected, and their prior knowledge is acknowledged.

### **I'm Not Doing This Without My Friends.**

Many adult learners thrive in a collaborative environment where they can share their experiences and insights. They prefer instructional methods such as case studies, problem-solving exercises, and group discussions over lecture-based learning.

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