



## Management and Performance Associates – August 2008

### What have you learned lately?

**“The ability to learn faster than your competitors may be the only sustainable competitive advantage.”**

**Arie de Geus – Corporate Planning Director  
Royal Dutch/ Shell**

The above quote, included in Peter Senge’s book *The Fifth Discipline*, invites serious reflection. If this works for organizations, it is reasonable to imagine that it is equally applicable to us, as individuals.

The more we believe that we have mastered whatever knowledge is needed in order to perform our job and there is not much else to learn, the more our organization becomes vulnerable, and so do we. Somerset Maugham once stated: “Only a mediocre person is always at his best.”

Learning can be triggered by curiosity (*Is there a better way to do this?*), by the circumstance (*I was attending a Technology presentation and guess what I have learned?*), or by the daily experience (*I tried a change in my influencing strategy and it worked!*). Learning can also be motivated by a crisis (*We are losing market share. We need to act fast and effectively.*), to avoid a crisis (*What can I do differently to prevent my client from doing business with the competition?*), or by pleasure (*Now I want to learn how to amaze my client.*)

It is important to be constantly alert to learning opportunities, out of our comfort zone, being aware that there is always something new to learn and being open to new ideas.

Here are some hints for our learning process to be continuous and to have a positive impact for us and for our organization.

#### 1. Establish a learning goal

Establish a specific learning goal, the same way you do with your corporate goals. Remember that learning goals must be specific, with a clearly defined objective and most importantly, they need to establish a timeline for incorporation in our repertoire of behaviors. As

an example, “I want to be able to sell my ideas with clarity and assertiveness, in a way which will influence decisions in my department, within 60 days.”

#### 2. Assess the gap to be overcome

The distance between the two opposites – the discontent with the current situation and the wish for a specific future state – creates the tension to motivate us during the learning process.

Some people face difficulties in pursuing their objectives, even when they are aware of the personal benefits of the change. For instance: “I would love to lead the next project but I’m unsure if it’s worth the risk of exposure.” Another example: “I would welcome a process that would make my tasks easier but it would take a lot of my time to develop it.” A final example: “I want to work in Sales, but I’m not sure if I would know how to deal with the objections clients might raise.”

Why does this happen? Because we are fully aware of the gap between our objective and reality. This gap can make the objective look unrealistic or far from possible. We can feel discouraged and become frustrated. The gap can also be a powerful source of energy. Without it, there would be no need for action to move in the desired direction. In truth, the gap is the source of creative energy, also called “creative tension.” Therefore, instead of giving up on a goal, enjoy the challenge to achieve it. Nothing is impossible when we clearly know what we want and we have a good action plan in our hands.

#### 3. Create an action plan

An action plan will leverage your creative tension strength and will take you in the desired direction. Start by identifying what you need to learn, how to do it, from whom, the date to start the process, and defining success indicators.



Revise your plan periodically to assess achievements and what you have still pending.

#### **4. Assess your development**

Ask for feedback, make a self-assessment, and analyze what the success indicators are suggesting. Regardless of the format, the fundamental thing is to be able to know to what extent you have reached your goal. More than knowing if you reached your goal, this process will stimulate the search for additional learning goals, generating a virtuous development cycle.

The consequence of this virtuous cycle is the creation of a competitive advantage for the organization and high individual standards, positioning your career in differentiated levels of excellence.

**See you next month. Suggestions are welcome.**

To know more of our training programs, please send us an e-mail to:

[sergio.pereira@mapa-way.com](mailto:sergio.pereira@mapa-way.com) or  
[sonia.dondice@mapa-way.com](mailto:sonia.dondice@mapa-way.com)

**Visit our website:**  
[\*\*www.mapa-way.com\*\*](http://www.mapa-way.com)