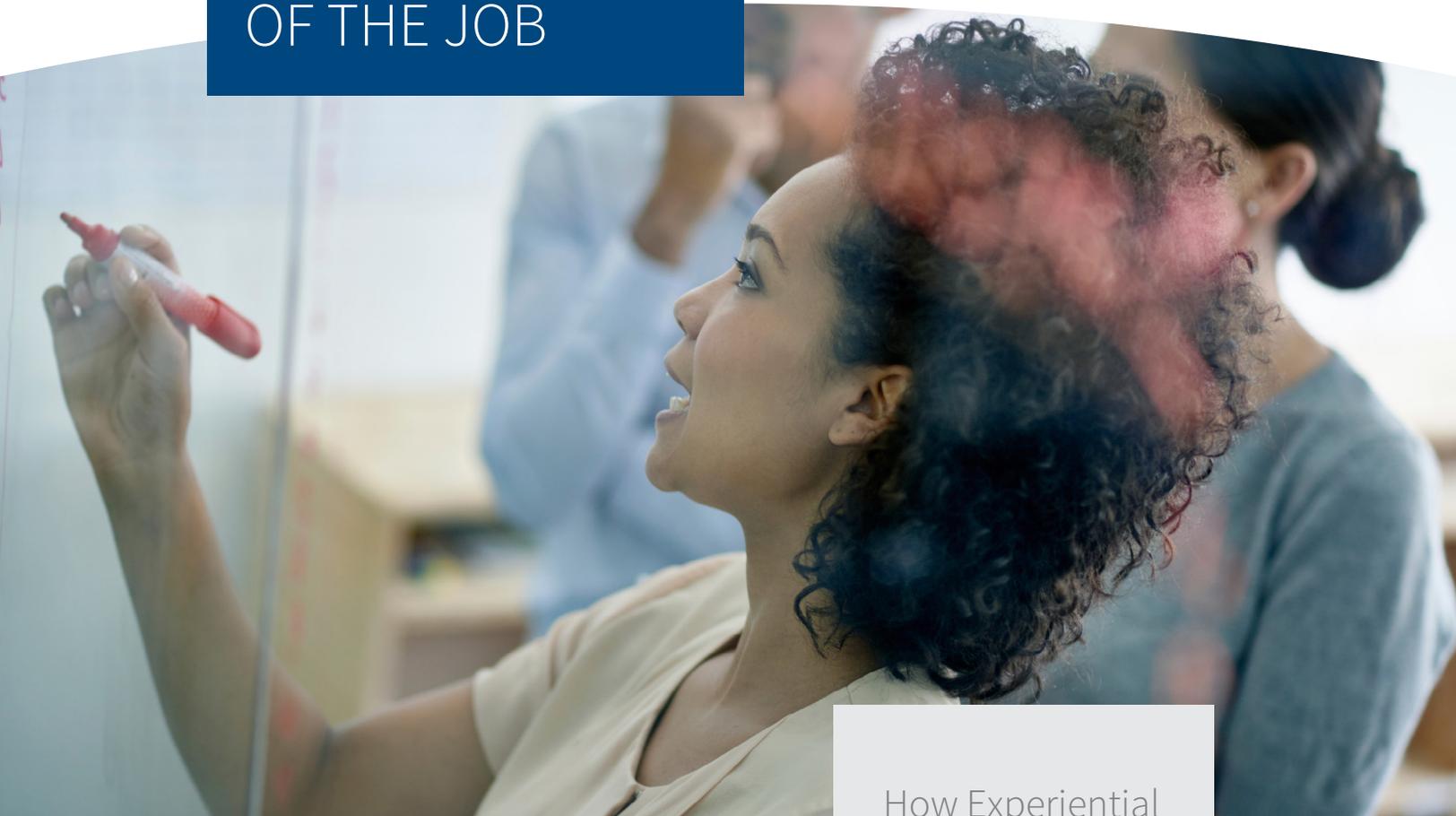


LEARNING IS PART
OF THE JOB

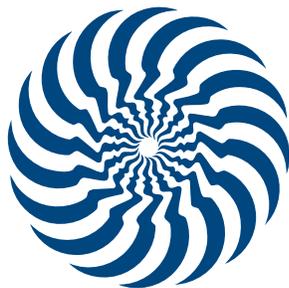


How Experiential
Learning Helps
Address Business
Challenges

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White Paper
Excerpt



APOLLOSM
EDUCATION GROUP

LEARNING IS PART OF THE JOB

A Cultural Shift Elevates Learning

Suddenly, it seems, more organizations are taking their workforces seriously. As the economy improves and the employment market becomes more competitive, the pressure to recruit and retain employees with the right mix of skills has become acute.

At the same time, the corporate learning function is taking on a more prominent role as an influencer of business results. Learning is no longer a “nice to have” function that can be addressed by occasional training sessions or a limited set of online learning tools. Rather, the future of professional development will require building learning opportunities into the organization’s culture—not just philosophically, but tactically.

Your Job is Your Training Ground

As a 25-year learning executive, much of my work now is to help companies bring learning out of the classroom and onto the job. It’s not that formal learning is bad—it’s just that it’s insufficient. Learning needs to be integrated into the day-to-day aspects of a worker’s job duties, and when necessary an employee should take on challenges or complete special projects to develop new skills while contributing to business operations.



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A longtime learning executive, strategist and innovator explains why the future of learning is in the job experience—and easier to implement than you think.

Most successful employees will say they got to where they are because of a working experience, project, or problem they were able to solve. The question I always ask is: “How can we make this repeatable so others can have the same experience to learn from?”

“Experiential learning”—learning that’s gained through direct experience, outside of a formal training session—is beginning to come to the forefront of talent executives’ thinking. Again, a question I ask is: “How can we structure experiential learning so that it can target very specific skills and outcomes, and be assignable as an integral part of how we develop talent in the enterprise?”

Here’s an example: You have an employee who struggles to keep up with and be responsive to email. In all other aspects, this employee may be a superstar, but this issue can be potentially crippling to their career. I personally had a mentor I truly admired who managed his in-basket with astonishing turnaround, and did so in the midst of having very demanding executive responsibilities. Essentially, he had developed the skill to have his in-basket cleared by the end of every day. Nothing slipped through the cracks, and this clearly contributed to his success.

So how can our employee learn this technique in a way that will truly stick? Do we send them to a class? Do we make them read a book? No. We would assign them a challenge that might be called “achieve inbox zero.” In this challenge, they would get a briefing of what would be expected of them, and how to go about it. In addition, they may be provided with links to videos, reading

materials, and success stories of individuals who have effectively cracked the email-management code and how this skill has affected their ability to focus and prioritize. There might be tips and techniques on how to set up folders, how to build filters, how to avoid spam, and how to “touch everything once.” After preparation, they would engage in this challenge for two weeks, and track data on their progress. At the end of two weeks, they could turn in their results, screen grabs of their now empty in-box, as well as a reflective report on what they learned, liked, and didn’t like.

At the end of this process, their work would be assessed against a rubric by a mentor proficient in this skill area, and the employee might even be awarded a badge indicating their successful completion of the challenge. So, for example, our “achieve inbox zero” challenge would be based on a rubric that assesses email management skills, including the ability to prioritize which emails are acted on, and the ability to demonstrate strategies to manage one’s inbox to a manageable size.

Whether we overtly recognize email management as a skill or not, it would be hard to argue that it is not a critically important part of every professional’s daily life, and those that do it well are more likely to succeed.



When approached in the context of business operations, experiential learning is repeatable, scalable and measurable.



Integrating learning into the work experience creates a structure of professional development based on competency, knowledge, skill and behavior models.

So, imagine hundreds of these challenges—all targeting specific skill muscles—that individuals can take on to develop themselves. This is not just an idea. It is how my colleagues and I are developing and delivering special employer-focused learning programs.

Learning Supports the Business Strategy

On the surface, the idea of tailoring corporate learning to the needs of individuals sounds complicated, resource-heavy and expensive. But that’s only on the surface. When approached in the context of business operations, experiential learning is repeatable, scalable and measurable.

Integrating learning into the work experience creates a structure of professional development based on competency, knowledge, skill and behavior models. It helps meet the organization’s strategic demands by building a workforce that is nimble, has the right skills, and possesses a consistent understanding of the company’s strategies and operations. As each individual’s performance improves, so does the performance of the overall workforce.

About The Author

As Chief Professional Development Officer at Apollo Education Group, Steve Rae works closely with the world's largest employers to address corporate talent development and talent management needs through innovative learning services and solutions. Prior to Apollo, Steve worked as Vice President of Learning Services at IBM, where he had global responsibility for driving enterprise talent development services. His passion comes from more than 20 years of experience in technology-based learning and human resource development. His approach is focused on maximizing value for employers through solutions that deliver scalable, deployable capabilities aligned with business goals.

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Apollo Education Group, Inc. is one of the world's largest private education providers, serving students since 1973. Through its subsidiaries, Apollo Education Group offers undergraduate, graduate, professional development and other nondegree educational programs and services, online and on-campus principally to working learners. Its educational programs and services are offered throughout the United States and in Europe, Australia, Latin America, Africa and Asia, as well as online throughout the world. For more information about Apollo Education Group, Inc. and its subsidiaries, call (800) 990-APOL or visit the Company's website at www.Apollo.edu.

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