



## How to Connect with Corporate Training Students

### Description

It's hard to come up with the right term to describe people in a corporate training course. In fact, even the terms *training* and *course* probably make some people bridle. But at least they are descriptive, where *learner* strikes me as a tad presumptuous. Won't those on the other end of the learning be the judges of whether they are learners or not?

I applaud the intent that the term *learner* implies, but anyone who has spent any time in a training room will know how ambitious it is to claim everyone present is there to learn.

So, what are the alternatives?

In mulling over this question, I recalled some of the best lecturers and facilitators I have worked with in the past. They didn't refer to or think about the people they taught as learners or participants or even delegates.

They called them students, accountants, managers, engineers, and so on. By using these terms, they spoke directly to people's context, needs, and ambitions: what they would need to learn and master in order to earn or fulfill their professional or occupational role.

## We Learn Most Effectively from Those We Identify With

In his influential work, [The Book of Learning and Forgetting](#) (1998), Frank Smith draws on what we would now call "social identity theory" to make the case that we learn most effectively, and almost effortlessly, from those we feel we identify with, who understand and share our concerns, and who hold the same values and outlook.

In the context of professional learning, this is part and parcel of how we learn our trade. The interactions with our seniors and peers were as important, if not more important, as the formal aspects of our training or education. We learn to be accountants or bankers or teachers not simply as a collection of competencies, but through interactions that contribute to our growing personal and professional identity. These professional identities inform who we are.

## Transferring Learning to the Workplace

The educators I refer to above didn't behave as if their class members were there to learn; they acted as if they were there to help the class become better engineers or accountants. It's an important difference.

They made the class feel they were all in it together, sharing a sense of purpose. They understood what the individuals needed to do, or know, to become a better salesperson or manager and gave it to them. They were "on the side of the learner," as articulated in [Dave Bowman's recent blog](#).

As we move to deliver more learning via digital methods, we need to ensure that no matter how the learning is presented—asynchronous digital or live online—it is geared to transferring that learning to the workplace and that the learning experience is seen and felt to be supportive of the specific role or occupation the learner is pursuing.

Ensuring we speak to the professional identity and concerns that are relevant to a person's role or career will be essential if we are to realize the intent of making them all learners.

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