



Stay HR Savvy with HR Elements®

Welcome to the UBA Partner Firm exclusive monthly newsletter delivering insights about timely human resources and employee benefits topics.

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Keep Learning “Sticky” with Nudge Theory

You conducted a thorough needs analysis and identified a true learning need for the team you manage. You identified an amazing trainer to develop content in a manner that engages and delights participants. One point for you, the star manager. The training takes place, and the initial feedback is positive all around! And then the rubber hits the road, and you watch as your team seemingly forgets these new skills in place of old habits and stale techniques. What the heck happened and how can you use Nudge Theory to support future learning?

It is important to first understand what happens after a training. Memory retention was investigated in 1885 by Hermann Ebbinghaus, a German psychologist. Through experimentation, he uncovered that time was a key factor in retention of new information. The Ebbinghaus [Forgetting Curve](#) shows that people lose the most information in the first few days.

Unfortunately, learners forget almost 60% of new information in less than an hour and around 90% of information within 7 days!

This is a huge problem for all involved: learning and development practitioners, managers, and employees alike.

Time, resources, and money were lost in this endeavor and the return on investment is questionable. Additionally, stakeholders may question the use of training as a valid learning tool. Is formal workplace education a lost cause?

Instead of throwing up your hands in despair, leverage another scientific discovery, the [Nudge Theory](#), to enforce retention of new information. Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein cowrote a book titled “Nudge: Improving the Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness” that brought the work of Israeli American psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky into popular literature in 2008. Nudge Theory considers how choices can be designed to influence human behavior.

In layman’s terms, a nudge is encouragement to take action in a positive direction.

Nudges are used throughout society (advertising is a great example). The dental email reminder that your six-month checkup is due is a nudge. It is a reminder of a beneficial choice and provides simple information on how you can take the next step (“schedule using this link”).

Nudges can be [applied to corporate learning](#), a domain where knowledge retention is a major risk. Why not build in ongoing reminders of content to attendees that stretch into the future? Utilize alternative communication vehicles such as texts, instant messages and learning platforms to reach your audience on the fly. Nudges can be used to keep new skills “sticky” post-training and extend the lifecycle of a learning event. These nudges can also address the “not enough time” problem pervasive in corporate culture. A nudge can invite learners to apply recent skills or introduce new concepts without the need to block off a whole afternoon. Offering multiple ways to engage with fresh material also encourages learners to take accountability.

The introduction of choices (“click here to learn more,” or prompts to use a new model) invites participants to personalize application, increasing the likelihood of completion.

While some may question if training is a valid solution to corporate learning challenges, others acknowledge that the field is always changing. It is evident that corporate training has evolved with the advent of more accessible technology, remote work, and shorter audience attention spans.

Utilizing Nudge Theory to counter the natural loss of new information following a training will help support employee development and cement new learning.

Generational Myths Part 3: Gen X

Today’s offices potentially span five full [generations](#) ranging from Generation Z to the Silent Generation. A coworker could just as easily be raised with a smart phone in hand as they could have used a typewriter at their first job. Some see differences between generational colleagues as an annoyance (“kids these days!”) and many rely on generational stereotypes as fact. Truth of that matter is that generational stereotypes have about as many holes in them as a piece of Swiss cheese. Current research questions the validity of generational stereotypes. This series uncovers top generational myths as a strategy to support a diverse and healthy employee population.

Next, we analyze the smallest generational group, born between 1965 and 1980: Generation X.

The [top three myths](#) of Gen X include:

1. They are “risk takers.”

Some believe that this group is characterized as being reactionary and rebellious. In fact, Generation X keeps a much lower profile at work. This group was called “the forgotten generation” by Pew Research. Why? Because they are a smaller group smashed in between two larger generations (Millennials and Baby Boomers).

Additionally, they are the generation least likely to be promoted at work. A 2018 Harvard Business Review study concluded that Millennials and Baby Boomers had received two or more promotions in the same period that 66% of Gen X received one or less. Gen X was raised hearing their parents complain about “work-life” balance. Truth is, they are the group most likely to be helping their children and parents in addition to work. This group is a reliable bunch who values loyalty.

2. Gen X has a hard time relating to other generations in the workplace.

While some say that Gen X alienates other generations, this couldn’t be further from the truth. Nielsen research called Generation X the “most connected” generation. Technology adaption played a huge role in their ability to bridge the generations above and below them. Most were not introduced to technology until adulthood.

This lack of computer access in their youth helps them relate to boomers in the office. At the same time, they share an excitement for technology with Millennials and lined up alongside them to get their first iPhones.

Generation X are natural collaborators and often play the role of connector in the office.

3. Their pessimism hurts them in the workplace.

Gen X has worked through several hefty recessions and watched their retirement accounts take devastating hits.

Experian reports that Generation X carries more debt than other groups and data from the National Association of Realtors showed this generation more likely to be declined for homeowner loans. So, can you blame them for being cynical? However, a closer look uncovers a different story in the way this shows up at work. Generation X is savvy because of these hardships and surprisingly content. In fact, a Better Hire survey concluded that more than 50% of Generation X participants are happy at work. They show up with an entrepreneurial spirit, owning their own destiny.

In sum, Gen X values stability rather than risk in the workplace. They play an important connector role at work with colleagues and at home with their families. Gen X has “been there, done that” and uses these lessons to make work enjoyable. They are an [important piece](#) in the generational puzzle.

Next up? Our final step in the generational series are our friends the Baby Boomers.

Learning to Say No

Relationships are key at work. Case in point - the people you work with are likely a big reason you took your role and may be the reason you left your last job. In fact, research shows that 75% of employees leave jobs because of one person – their boss. So, it is not a reach to say that most workers want a good bond with the people they’re with for eight hours a day. This is one of the reasons that saying “no” at work can be so difficult.

At times, declining a project or request can feel like a career killer. However, if U.S. employees have learned nothing else during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is the need to draw boundaries between work and home. And this involves saying “no.” You can do this while maintaining positive relationships by evaluating your options, offering alternatives, and asking for help reprioritizing.

It is easy to get in a slump of automatically saying “yes” to all requests coming your way without concern for how it will affect other projects and deadlines.

It can be just as easy to fall into a trap of always saying “no.” These extremes can be taxing on you and your relationships. [Saying “no” at work](#) is hard but needs to be done to maintain sanity, give space for your priorities and not turn you into a “dumping ground.” Instead of falling back on your gut instinct, evaluate requests coming your way. This may mean you actually ask for more time to consider if you are able to contribute. It also means that you need to speak up with any questions that can help you figure out how they fit into your objectives, schedule, and other commitments. The good news is that after evaluating, you can respond with confidence. Declining is a lot easier when you have assessed the situation and can clarify why this particular request is not attainable. This level of honesty will also aid in establishing trust with your coworker or supervisor.

Saying “no” can feel abrupt to someone who prides themselves on being a team player, always ready to step in.

An option that can help soften the blow is to offer alternatives. Is there another colleague who you have coached and can recommend for the project? Is there a part of the task that you can achieve that takes less time and resources? Can you offer to help at a later date or time? These options may be received better by the listener because they may take the shape of saying “yes” for something else. The recommendations also help move the project ahead without you taking on the full workload.

Finally, there will be situations where the project is of utmost importance or offers an incredible opportunity for you to work on personal goals and objectives. In these situations, you may want to figure out a way to say “yes,” but this may mean shifting priorities off other projects. A good first step is assessing your current projects to see if something else can be delegated or moved to a later date. If so, you will need to communicate these shifting priorities (which, in theory, is another version of saying “no”). Before following through, it may be smart to ask for your manager’s counsel to ensure you are on the same page. Asking for support also provides your manager with insight into what is on your plate which may not be front and center otherwise.

Learning to say “no” is a skill that must be developed in the professional world. Everyone has objectives they are trying to meet, and your goals may go out the window if you always jump in to help others. The good news is there are many ways to say “no” and maintain good relationships with those around you. Like any other skill, this takes practice. And if you have been a “yes” person in the past, just know that others around you may be thrown off by your initial negative response. This takes time, too, but is an important step in you developing this new aptitude.