

Grown-up approach

Teaching and sharing your knowledge can be very rewarding, but experienced FMs considering teaching, lecturing or tutoring as part of their CPD programme may find adult learners both critical and demanding, warns Jane Wiggins

With pressure on their time and their budgets (either corporate or personal), it is not surprising that adult learners have high expectations. A great deal of academic research has been carried out into the special and particular traits of how adults learn, which includes work by Roger, Silverman, Bass and Vaughan, and Mumford. A summary of the best ways that adults learn is outlined below in the following 22 principles:

1. **Negotiation** – In an ideal world negotiation between the trainer and trainee begins with goal-setting, planning, implementation and evaluation of the training. The process starts before the course begins and should be continuous.
2. **Setting goals** – Adults will achieve their training or development goals best if the goals agreed are directly relevant to their experience, needs and interests.
3. **Self-diagnosis** – As adults, we prefer to undertake our own training-needs analysis, in either a formal or informal way.
4. **Ownership** – As adults we need to own the process of learning, and to accept that it is not what the trainer does to us, but how we learn through changes in our attitudes, perceptions and behaviour.
5. **Self-sufficiency** – Adult learners need to become autonomous in their learning, to be self-sufficient and move away from total dependence on the trainer. This is achieved through their experiences and activities, and group training processes.
6. **Responsibility** – Adults need to be encouraged to take full responsibility for their own learning.
7. **Sharing** – Adults often learn as much from each other as they do from the trainer/teacher. To facilitate this, confidentiality must be emphasised, and the right conditions must be established for sharing ideas, feelings and experiences. The trainer's role is to ensure that the conditions of equality, trust, openness and respect for different views are created.
8. **Climate** – The learning environment must be safe, stimulating, supportive and challenging. Ideally this means free from the office, away from distractions and in a congenial environment.

9. **Attitude** – A positive attitude, a willingness to change and to challenge established habits, attitudes and beliefs is essential.

10. **Uncertainty** – Adults need to accept that many questions will either have more than one answer or no answers at all. Depending on past learning experiences and the need for security, this position may be hard to accept and could limit the learning outcomes.

11. **Group learning** – Learners can also lead and facilitate learning sessions, and opportunities to benefit from other adult learners need to be facilitated by the trainer.

Adult learners tend to be present-centred, and will want short-term rewards from their learning

12. **Participation** – Some adults will have developed a very structured understanding of their world, which can both inhibit or enhance learning. Courses that encourage and facilitate participation are a way of making use of the experiences of adult learners.

13. **Quick wins** – Adult learners tend to be present-centred, and will want short-term rewards from their learning. Tangible results that can be usefully and immediately applied are essential to engage with adult learners.

14. **Real problems** – Adults are stimulated by working through issues and solutions, rather than being fed information.

15. **Active** – Adults learn from active sessions such as simulations, problem-solving, role plays and presentations.

16. **Principles** – Adult learners need the 'how and why' so that they can transfer their learning into other contexts.

17. **Process** – Adults should be equipped with the tools of learning, to understand their learning styles and to reflect on how they are learning.

18. **Progress** – Adult learners need to feel that they are progressing towards worthwhile goals.

19. **Integration** – Adults like to link their learning to the bigger picture and see the connections between ideas, theories and practical applications.

20. **Mistakes** – These are learning opportunities which adults must value as much as success.

21. **Knowledge** – Original insights can come from adult learners just as much as from accredited sources of authority and wisdom.

22. **Change** – Adults will widen their behaviours by thinking and acting differently – although a risky strategy, it is an important outcome of the adult learning process.

All of these principles need to be considered when it comes to developing a training programme, or planning your own development programme.

As adults, we need to recognise that our learning will involve three main processes: memorising facts, understanding concepts, and doing physical things. By finding out what needs to be understood and why it is important, we can judge the purpose of learning. We can then make comparisons with similar and different experiences, consider different viewpoints and identify problems and solve them **fm**

Further information

Jane Wiggins, MBA, CFM, FBIFM, is chair of BIFM Education Sector Forum and BIFM manager, BPP Malpas. BPP Malpas is part of BPP Professional Education and provides home study materials and support for students studying for the BIFM part 1 and part 2 examinations. For further details, ring 020 8253 6146 or e-mail bifm@bpp.com. www.malpas.co.uk