Retool, Retool, Retool—And Sooner Than You Think

For those of us in continuing education, we are true believers. We believe that education makes a difference and that frequent educational encounters are important. And then I read what AT&T Chief Executive Officer Randall Stephenson said (Shinneman, 2017). Yikes!

In a meeting with some college students, Stephenson revealed that he believed the maximum duration of anyone’s skill set, including his, is 2 years (Shinneman, 2017). I know for the state with a requirement for continuing education documentation, to maintain one’s license to practice is 2 years—and that is simply as a matter of convenience so that a state board doesn’t have to consider thousands of us each year. Two years takes on new importance when a business leader identifies that even his skill set must be renewed on a constant basis.

I thought about the communications industry, and I compared it mentally with health care. Both are technology intense, both have major roles in society, both have the need for a highly educated workforce, both are challenged with finding new workers to replace departing ones, and both have an intense need to learn.

Stories of nurses rushing up to the deadline for the renewal of their licenses without sufficient continuing education are currently few and far between. In part, we have probably become accustomed to knowing that we have to meet this requirement. In addition, informed nurses got the message from the Institute of Medicine (2010) (now the Academy of Medicine) report on The Future of Nursing that lifelong learning was an expectation. In part, anyone currently actively engaged in health care gets the point that today’s care is different than that of even a few months ago. More evidence is being amassed that directs our care. New equipment and technologies aid in our provision of care. People seeking care come armed with information and expect that we know what they know (even on obscure conditions), and then some.

We are both forced to learn and motivated to learn. That force comes from the fact of our changing science. We have to learn the new, or else we are dangerous practitioners. The motivation derives from our desire to do well by those entrusted to our care and from our desire to be well-informed.

At one point in our history, our challenges were related to how to get people to engage in learning. Now, our challenges are related to how to get the best information and experiences for our learners in the best format possible in the shortest time! We have 2 years to overhaul everything all of the time. That is our challenge. How do we retool ourselves?

What an exciting time to be focused on lifelong learning!

REFERENCES

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