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The need to improve levels of employee engagement continues to be on the radar of the majority of L&D teams. Our Viewpoint (pp. 3-6), from Terry Hill, tells the tale of Bob and Sam, reminding us that the line manager role continues to be the crucial key to releasing the locked and often blocked potential of our employees. Not just a story, there is also some succinct advice on how developing a “level 4” mindset can shift line manager thinking and behavior.

Will you remember the story of Bob and Sam in a few months’ time? Research from Kamal Jain indicates that you might (pp. 7-10). Through his inquiry into the retention value of stories versus factual information, we learn that the former are two to three times better remembered, even after a gap of three months. His call for further investigation into whether that might then translate into greater changes in actual behavior would be a useful follow-up.

Hilary Scarlet widens the scope from memory to focus on the whole mind (pp. 11-13). She wants us to be even more “brain saavy” by recognizing that our brains are just not designed for modern organizations. She provides a concise summary of some of the latest developments in neuroscience together with some insights into how these can be applied by managers. Performance improvements from changes made by a small group of leaders, who were introduced to some neuro-scientific concepts, are impressive.

How a manager communicates with each individual team member is one critical element of great performance. Jackie and Milton Mayfield highlight the benefits of applying the framework of Motivating Language (ML) to encourage and nurture employee self-direction, or self-leadership (pp. 14-17). The three tables, that set out specific ML strategies to reinforce behavior, constructive thoughts and natural rewards, are particularly helpful.

One element of self-leadership is taking responsibility for your own learning. “Expertise – from the mouths of babes” (pp. 22-24), reminds us that humans are instinctive learners from birth. The article goes on to report on research into the drivers for informal learning in the workplace. Commitment to learning and development, feedback and interactions were found to be the top three. In a similar vein, “How knowledge workers become effective learners” reports on a study within the finance sector which reveals ways that the learning environment and individuals’ personal characteristics affect learning at work (pp. 25-27). The analysis highlights specific aspects of self-regulated learning behavior that mediate the relationship between the workplace learning context and workplace learning activity.

Moving away from informal, self-driven learning, MOOCs (Massive Open On-line Courses) might be said to be at the opposite end of a spectrum, so, do they have a place? Fong-Yew Ong and Manimekalai Jambulinam provide us with a useful summary (page 18-21). Examples are given from some “early adopting” organizations, followed by the upsides/ downsides of MOOCs and a note on how to address some of the implementation issues. A further technological pneumonic IVW (Immerisve Virtual World) is explored in “Virtual Worlds provide real learning benefits” (pp. 28-30). Research from Maynooth University in Ireland found that a majority of students preferred Machinima over DVDs.

In “House that Jack Built favored Six Sigma” (pp. 31-33), we hear of an investigation that aimed to clarify the role of a “Black Belt” (listing 29 different responsibilities) and identify the skills and development people need to make the role work most effectively. Unsurprisingly, the need for a greater focus on soft skills is highlighted.

We finish with a summary of, and recommendation for, the latest book from Robert Kaplan (pp. 34-35), “What you really need to lead – The power of thinking and acting like an owner”. Definitely one for the “wish list” as we approach the end of 2016.

On behalf of the DLO team, compliments of the season and best wishes for 2017.