



Recipe for mediocrity: easier, faster, cheaper

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Ever wonder why we seem to be experiencing an epidemic of ineptitude these days?

Many professionals just don't seem to be as qualified as they used to be, regardless of whether we're talking about plumbers or politicians.

Actually, this is no mystery. Our collective refrain is increasingly "easier, faster, cheaper." And unfortunately, this mantra has filtered into our companies, campuses, schools and other institutions.

"There is no substitute for physical presence."

For several years, I taught classes on teamwork at a high-profile company in the region. The employees at this company were required to attend several classes – on an annual basis – in order to enhance their ability to work together more effectively. They enjoyed the classes and the results were evident in their daily operations.

All was fine until some genius in upper management decided they could probably replace those classes with on-line modules that would cover the same content but be much less costly.

So that's what they did.

Subsequently, I would see some of my former students at the grocery store or a restaurant. I'd ask how the "new" training was going. To a person, they hated it. They were learning nothing. It was now simply something they had to endure.

The Bottom Line: You can't teach the hands-on skills needed to be an effective team member in this format. Interactive demonstrations, role-play, and individualized in-person feedback are essential to acquiring the necessary competencies.

Sure, the company saved money. But the outcome was far from what it had been previously.

And entirely predictable.

"Convenience can lead to incompetence."

I also teach classes intended to get participants ready to take various certification exams. One such program I have been extensively involved with is designed to prepare people to take the Certified Associate in Project Management Exam.

In order to sit for CAPM certification, you need 23 hours of formal training in project management education. The way this education is typically provided is through six, four-hour classes, each session conducted one night a week.

Not long ago, another management genius wanted the training delivered to his employees in three, eight-hour classes conducted over three Fridays (they wanted an extra hour just for good measure). I explained that this was not ideal because students needed down time between each weekly meeting to reflect upon and digest the content, which is substantial.

To which I was told “Yeah, but it’s more convenient for us to do it over three successive Fridays.”

I ended up delivering the CPAM classes in both formats: once a week for five weeks and three days over two weeks.

The Rest of the Story: The folks who took five weeks to prepare for the Exam all passed. Of those who participated in the three Fridays, less than a third passed the Exam.

Interestingly, those who didn’t pass blamed the instructor, which I have found to be a pretty convenient excuse.

It takes time to acquire and master a complex skill set. And it takes even more time to learn how to apply that skill set in real world applications.

Don’t believe me?

Next time you need brain surgery, ask yourself this: Would I have more confidence in a neurosurgeon who spent years learning how to do brain surgery in a “traditional” program - under the guidance of more experienced neurosurgeons who taught the appropriate techniques face-to-face?

Or would I have more confidence in a neurosurgeon who learned how to operate in an “accelerated” program where a lot of the training was done virtually? Perhaps they graduated with a specialty in pediatrics but decided to get a “certificate” in neurosurgery to expand their patient base.

In case you haven’t noticed, this kind of streamlined yet inferior approach is becoming much more commonplace in many professions.

Anyway, which would you prefer? Think about it. I can wait.



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