

# **Accelerated Learning at Mellon Bank**

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Imagine you are walking down a hallway with several classrooms. As you walk by the first room, you hear classical music and notice that the Learners are sitting on the floor with paper and pencils. You also notice that two large tables at the front of the room are covered with bright, colorful fabric. On top of the tables appear to be wrapped gifts.

As you approach and pass the second room, you see that the Learners are sitting in groups on the floor circled around a game board. They are involved in an intense and animated discussion. Then, as you pass the third classroom, you again notice that the Learners are in small groups. Some of them are holding puppets and appear to be planning some sort of puppet show.

The walls are covered with posters of all sizes. Some are reproductions of famous pieces of art; others are scenes of nature and people from various cultures and backgrounds. The scent of lilac wafts past you.

Where could such a stimulating instructional setting exist? You would probably not guess that these classes and this engaging environment exist in the corporate training world and that the Learners are adults being trained to perform various functions in a financial services corporation. But, this type of setting is becoming more common in Mellon Bank's Retail Training Area.

Mellon's Retail Training has recently decided to incorporate the Accelerated Learning (AL) methodology into both its instructional design and its delivery of training for its entire curriculum. The decision by Kim Rhule, manager of Mellon's Retail Training design and delivery functions, was based on a number of reasons.

- The fundamental principles of adult learning and human cognition are incorporated into each Accelerated Learning course. AL takes a very systematic, deliberate approach to both the design and delivery of training.

The objectives for each lesson, how the material will be input, and how it will be activated are explained in detail, including the music (if needed), overheads to use, and other media necessary. The designer makes the intention very clear, so the Trainer has no doubt about the purpose of each lesson or the intended outcomes for participants. For Mellon retail this is appealing because of the size of its retail network. Having everyone 'on the same page' in terms of delivery is a definite need for us. We want to ensure that we are providing consistent, quality training across all Retail regions and training sites.

- Accelerated Learning caters to Learners of all learning styles. Because of the deliberate design, the material is presented in several ways to accommodate and engage different learning styles and appeal to different senses: the visual, the auditory, and the kinesthetic (and when appropriate, the olfactory and/or gustatory senses as well). Interestingly, upon initial measurement, Mellon Retail Training is discovering that many of its store employees are kinesthetic learners, who grow bored in traditional lecture-intensive training settings.

Learners in the AL environment are able to master a large amount of material in a shorter period of time and are able to retain the material long after the class is over. Since January of this year, participants in Mellon retail training classes have consistently stated that they feel comfortable with the amount of material presented, with the pace of the classes, and they have expressed confidence in their ability to immediately apply what they have learned to the work environment. In the past, participants in the same classes have stated that they felt they needed more time to sufficiently grasp the same amount of material.

- Some fundamental AL principles can be immediately incorporated into any class for any topic to attain superior results. Regarding the use of AL methods, response from participants in Mellon's Retail training classes has been overwhelmingly positive. Here are a few examples of comments we have received from participants in a number of classes across all regions:
  - "Training was very fun and relaxing!"
  - "I thought I'd be bored in here and instead I had fun and learned."
  - "I loved the stress-free environment."
  - "Varied class activities helped to enhance the learning."
  - "Despite my own lack of self-confidence, I was able to master the subject matter."
  - "I found the use of music helped me to better remember the material."

### **The Accelerated Learning Model**

Accelerated Learning is a multi-modal, multi-sensory approach to training, which incorporates Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, the theory of "Suggestopedia" by Dr. Georgi Lozanov and Evelyn Gateva of Bulgaria, and the power of the arts to provide consistent, effective training outcomes.

The AL method focuses entirely on the learner and creating a positive, non-threatening environment, which encourages learners to become active participants in the learning process. Less time is spent inputting information than activating it. Seventy to seventy-five percent of each lesson, for instance, is devoted to activities which engage the learners in working with the content in a variety of ways: creating skits, writing stories or commercials, making posters, playing games, are just a few examples.

Beginning in January of this year, Mellon Bank's Retail training delivery teams have attended a number of workshops conducted by the International Center for Accelerative Learning (ICAL) to learn the AL models used in training delivery and design.

ICAL Trainers don't just "talk the talk". They teach the course entirely in the AL format, allowing us to experience AL at the same time we were practicing the techniques. In the design phase, we worked on courses we are developing to roll out this year. ICAL again modeled the design process and became our mentors.

ICAL conducts sessions throughout the year and works on an individual basis with corporations world-wide. The list of ICAL clients includes:

- United Airlines
- Bell-Atlantic Corporation
- Kellogg Company
- Boeing
- Ford Motor Company

ICAL will be conducting a number of workshops in Pittsburgh throughout August of this year. Mellon Bank will host the sessions, which are open to the public.

If you are interested in learning more about the AL method, you can contact ICAL by email, [Center4AL@aol.com](mailto:Center4AL@aol.com).