

THE DIGITAL AGE SECRET FOR SUCCESS: ADULT LEARNING

Checkout Challenge!

At the convenience store, Henry and Lucinda walked up to the counter with their coffee and pastries and were not greeted by the clerk; instead, she gestured them toward a large, flat screen monitor. There was a message on the screen, “Click to Begin.” Lucinda felt around the screen for a cord or computer pencil but could not find one.

She said to Henry, “I can’t find the stylus.”

Before Henry could respond, the clerk came to their machine, simultaneously glancing at the growing line and Lucinda.

The clerk said, “Please, click to begin!”

Lucinda responded, “Yes, but there is no stylus.”

The clerk replied, “Ma’am, it’s a touch screen; just tap it with your finger.”

Henry reached over and poked the screen. “Lucinda, we didn’t think about it. It’s just like at our bank.”

The screen lit up with bright colors and said, “Please swipe your items.”

Henry exclaimed, “Okay, that is different! Swipe, what do you think that means?”

Lucinda said, “I think maybe we are the clerks. Try holding the donut package over the screen, with the bar code facing it. Let’s see if that works.”

Sure enough, Lucinda and Henry had used their adult learning skills to solve the day’s first technology dilemma.

Whether we are waiting for a seat at a restaurant, shopping for groceries, visiting the doctor's office, or buying gifts online, when we examine our surroundings, we recognize scores of technology tools in use. From many users' perspectives, it seems as if these interfaces change so frequently that it is impossible to keep up with how to use them for their originally intended purposes. For instance, the many ways in which we use our cell phones today can be so distracting that one might wonder whether talking on the phone is an essential function any more.

The hand-cranked register and operator-assisted phone call are in the memories of only a few of us. Instead, people born after 1980 accept the rapid succession of new versions and generations of technologies as routine, even as the changes increase in pace demanding attention and mastery! From the touch-screen checkout terminal, to annual new smartphones and innumerable on-demand entertainment services, the confusion, choices, and demands that surround new devices are often overwhelming. Whether it is in our personal, recreation, or work lives, technology changes mean people have to constantly figure out different ways to reach their goals. It is a daily challenge to survive the constant onslaught of new technologies and related practices. Adult learning is the key to success in conquering this relentless wave of change.

Most of the examples presented at the beginning of the chapters are drawn from the context of adults' personal lives. However, the stakes and tensions escalate more quickly and to greater heights when related to workplace changes. Of course, those who adore technology, "techie" and "geeks," thrive on such changes. Technology experts are interested, invested, and talented in using technology as well as finding new ways to modify and incorporate it. If you recall the events surrounding the frequent new iPhone releases, you will remember that its early adopters consider them pivotal. These debuts are so thrilling to techies that many will camp out for days at local electronics stores to be first in line to purchase and own the "latest and greatest" gadget.

However, the world is not solely composed of techies (and my partner says, "Thank goodness!"). Indeed, vast percentages of the population are not technology aficionados, and they may struggle, even dread, these incessant technology changes. Why? Because it means learning yet another device or program. Plus, the stakes are high in this challenge: They must master these new technologies in order to meet organizational demands and retain their income.

The crux of the matter is that new technologies not only force people to master new features and devices but also they require them to determine how to incorporate those technology capabilities in their work flow. Often, this latter requisite is not addressed in the little, if any, training that organizations provide. Instead, somehow, everyone is supposed to make the leap from technical skills to work-flow application. This constant call for critical connections is a major example of when people need to employ self-directed learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Such independent learning has become a frequent part of life in the digital age because we need to operate these gadgets to communicate with our family and friends and to accomplish our work assignments.

This constant call for critical connections is a major example of when people need to employ self-directed learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.

Yet, as recently as 1980, in school, these same adults were trained to not only be dependent on their teachers for instruction but also to focus on routine learning. Dominant forms of instruction were rote memorization, work sheets, multiplication charts, and regurgitation of information exactly as the teacher transmitted it (Fink, 2014; Freire, 1972; Jonassen, 1994). Since that time, there have been several significant shifts of educational philosophy and instructional practice across grade school through college level (the P–20 continuum, as it is now called) (Elias & Merriam, 2004).

Fink's (2014) *Creating Significant Learning Experiences* is one of the most comprehensive approaches to classroom instruction and instructional design and builds on adult learning principles. For example, Fink's work effectively articulates the need for and ways of incorporating learner-centered instruction, learners' prior experience, peer learning, and strategies for using technology platforms. First published in 2003, this book introduced the model of integrated course design (ICD), which provided a welcome departure from the teacher-centered course design that had previously dominated higher education.

In the digital age, more schools have begun to focus on student-centered, peer-, and self-directed learning rather than teacher-centered instruction (Christensen, Horn, & Johnson, 2008; Conrad & Donaldson, 2012; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2015). Since the technology revolution of the late 1980s, the need for and vision of these dramatic instructional changes have developed, and it has been an exciting, albeit at times frustrating, revolution to experience.

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have been a nationwide effort in the United States to explicitly connect critical thinking, problem-solving, and self-directed learning skills to independent learning, yet state to state these standards have been unevenly communicated to students because of several obstacles. According to Kober and Rentner (2011), challenges to successful CCSS implementation include insufficient resources, unclearly stated CCSS implementation guidelines, the shifting focus on mandatory state tests, and so on. It is evident that such conditions create an unstable foundation for refocusing the national educational system.

In the adult learning field, there are a variety of theories that encompass the skills and orientation that adults need in order to be successful in the digital age. Self-directed learning, informal learning, and lifelong learning are just a few of the areas that adult learning practitioners and theorists understand well. However, within the broader literature and technology adoption and practice, adult learning is seldom mentioned.

The Lifesaver

If one considers the many ways in which technology has pushed adult learning to the forefront of our lives in the digital age, it is surprising that the phenomenon has gone largely unnoticed by most people, including experts in the field. This book presents a thorough

introduction to the opportunities for leveraging adult learning within the digital age. It presents what we know about helping adults be most successful in addressing technology-related learning.

In the virtual sea of the digital age, adult learning becomes a very real lifesaver!

How exactly can adult learning be an effective lifesaver for technology learning dilemmas in the digital age? This book's approach is to explore and discuss several strands of adult learning knowledge and craft strategies for effective independent learning; specifically, the proposed approaches and strategies will leverage informal and formal learning, self-directed and peer learning, and transformative and online learning to provide ways to learn and thrive in the digital age.

A wide range of possibilities exist, but we have to pause to consider what we know about adult learning *and* how to aptly apply it to the challenges and opportunities that the digital age presents today and will continue to do so tomorrow. This approach is a dynamic, generative, and open-ended one. It is dynamic because it enables us to create different ways to respond to the challenges. It can be described as generative because many times new strategies and ways of thinking or problem-solving continue to emerge. And it is certainly open-ended because its very premise is that it can be used to consider and address all the new demands and needs that the digital age continues to provide.

The next section introduces six key opportunities that technology has created for adults and adult learning. Included is an overview (a primer of sorts) that introduces each of these orientations to adult learning and the digital age: andragogy, motivation, self-directed learning, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, diversity and multicultural skills, and transformative learning. In Part 2 of this book, each of these topics will be the focus of its own chapter and discussed in greater detail.

Andragogy

Andragogy is a constellation of characteristics identified and popularized by Malcolm Knowles, who defined the term simply as “the art and science of teaching adults” (1980, pp. 43–44). Knowles recognized that compared to the techniques used to teach younger students, adults use and thrive with a different approach to learning. Knowles distinctly identified that andragogy was not a theory but instead a conceptual framework, “assumptions” (Knowles, 1989, p. 112), which could guide the development of theory, practice, and research (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005).

However, the key characteristics of andragogy (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005) align well with 21st-century experience of adults coping with the digital age:

- Adults need to know why they engage (or need to engage) in learning.
- Adults are self-directed and autonomous.
- Adults may use their prior experiences as a resource for learning.

- Adults are ready to learn when learning emerges from real-life situations (i.e., their social role tasks, responsibilities, etc.).
- Adults are motivated to solve problems and immediately apply learning that relates to their context.
- Adults have strong internal motivators, although external motivators can be leveraged.

Andragogical principles provide an entry point for reframing our thinking about learning in adulthood and in many contexts. It also provides a foundation for understanding lifelong learning, which emphasizes the endless scope of our ability to learn as adults. More than ever we see examples of how learning occurs continually across one's life span through *continuing learning* and *informal learning*. (We will discuss these terms in detail soon.)

In the digital age, learning knows no boundaries because it is no longer restricted to specific time frames, spaces, or domains. One can see the principles of andragogy needed in just a few of the following examples:

- Workplace learning: training sessions to learn new policies, equipment, and software
- Community education: stained-glass design classes at the arts center (also could be classified as arts learning)
- Continuing education: online, on-demand noncredit classes in new business software at the local college (On-demand means one can download the modules when you are available to learn, not according to prescribed session dates.) (also could be classified as technical learning)
- Higher education: certificate program in entrepreneurship at the local college
- Recreational learning: swing dance at the community center
- Spiritual learning: meditation classes via a holistic wellness podcast

Consider the need for new learning when young adults are hired for their first professional career position. From office or technical applications to human resource applications (e.g., personnel forms, insurance designations, tax withholding, leave, travel, etc.) and job-specific requirements (e.g., equipment to perform your job responsibilities), there is a steep learning curve that is not usually included in their formal education. However, the learning does not stop there. By mid-career many adults are entering their third, fourth, or fifth occupations and by that point might have returned to college for an additional credential, degree, or certificate. And, yes, the technology platforms have changed several times during those 10 to 20 years of these adults' careers. New career objectives, new technologies—lifelong learning has continued.

Motivation

In the digital age, the continuous, rapid changes in the technology of our lives motivates most adults, whether they know it or not, to pursue lifelong learning. Adults now learn throughout their life span and in a multitude of settings: from the workplace to their

personal lives. Contrary to past practice, adults' learning efforts are much less confined to formal education or training seminars. Instead, adults engage in many forms of learning through their lives.

Cognitive psychology and research explain that motivation has intrinsic and extrinsic aspects (Bandura, 1986; Weiner, 1972). For example, as adults seek to communicate with family, they must conquer the details of new technology along the way. Parsing the differences among intrinsic and extrinsic motivations is not always simple on the surface; however, a telling distinctive is the urgency of the motivation.

Much learning in the digital age is related to the internal desires of the individual to reach a goal. Therefore, these efforts would be classified as internal motivations. Wlodkowski (1993, 2011) has provided a foundation for understanding and leveraging motivation in adult learning. Regardless of age groups or contexts, tapping the power of motivation for informal and formal learning is one of the major keys for conquering the many challenges of the digital age.

For example, during the later career stage, adults experience more changes in work responsibility demands, expectations, and they are happening more quickly because of changing conditions and new technologies. Even in the "golden days" of retirement, adults may epitomize diverse educational motivations and lifelong learning as they continue to learn new or different strategies, seek information on topics related to health, and use new technologies as they engage in recreation, personal development, and entertainment (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). A theme popularized in many movies and books shows that some mature adults even explore new careers ("encore careers" or "dream careers") in their 60s, 70s, and beyond (Elcott, 2010; Jelenko & Marshall, 2007).

How did this tremendous change happen? Why would adults invest in and bother to continue to learn? Fundamentally, what is the motivation for most adults to be lifelong learners? It may be simple but certainly essential. In order to successfully function in the digital age, adults' intrinsic motivation includes a paradigm of continuous learning and mind stretching (Selwyn, Gorard, & Furlong, 2006). This paradigm not only extends across the life span but also needs to be independent and self-directed.

Self-Directed Learning

Characteristics of self-directed learning (SDL) were delineated by Tough in 1971 and expanded on by Knowles in 1975. The foundational principles of self-directed learning are that adults identify, plan, and implement their learning independently. This process includes identifying their own learning needs, resources, and strategies (Tough, 1967, 1971, 1979; Wang & Cranton, 2012).

Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) provided a widely recognized definition of SDL, which described how individuals hold the central and primary role in their learning. Moreover, this deeper understanding of self-directed learning included the many choices and actions that the learner controls, such as the means and time line for identifying a topic of learning, gathering information, deciding what is relevant, analyzing new information, and forming

new understandings by determining analyses, interpretations, and applications. Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) also developed a theoretical framework for SDL and applied it to different settings.

Mezirow (1981) proposed 12 core concepts that needed to be included in the development of SDL among adults. Later research by Suanmali (1981) confirmed eight of these SDL core strategies. Although the adult learning field has continued to use and test these strategies in the formal cultivation of adults' self-directed learning, mainstream P-20 education has not recognized the need until very recent years.

Frequently, adults in the digital age engage in learning when they have no instructor or guide. They must figure out how to accomplish their goal, which may be anything from printing a document to using the rental car global positioning system (GPS) to learning enough Cantonese to navigate their vacation needs, and so on. Furthermore, they must determine how they are going to learn the skills or information they need. There are many different variations of these examples; together they confirm the strong connection between everyday learning situations and the SDL model. The digital age is replete with SDL demands.

Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills

Included in the SDL process are critical thinking and problem-solving skills. As people face new situations and technologies, they must determine how to create their learning pathways. Critical thinking has been defined in many ways, and valuable insight is offered into thinking about what critical thinking is. Pithers and Soden (2000) provided what has become a popular definition: "Critical thinking in any area involves being able to pursue one's questions through self-directed search and interrogation of knowledge, a sense that knowledge is contestable, and being able to present evidence to support ones' arguments" (p. 239).

Regarding its origins, general consensus is that awareness of critical thinking was first articulated by Socrates, whose approach to questioning was based on the premise of exposing unexamined beliefs and assumptions. Bloom's (1956) taxonomy helped educators categorize different thinking strategies and provided examples of each. Krathwohl's (2002) popular revision of the taxonomy identifies the levels from basic to advance as remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating (synthesis). Critical thinking enters Bloom's taxonomy sequence in the analyzing stage.

In this age of technology innovation, when discussing critical thinking with educators and adult learners, descriptions such as the following are effective to illuminate key concepts:

Critical thinking includes being able to sift fact from fallacy, asking hard questions about information and situations that go deeper than the basic facts. These questions may include examining motivations, purposes, assumptions, values, and so on. However, by using critical thinking skills, people are able to better determine the value and meaning of information, which leads to more sound decision making.

Among other skills, successful problem-solving builds on critical thinking skills. In order to solve problems, not only must one have basic content knowledge but also be able to pose questions and extract information from a given situation. In the digital age, questioning prior assumptions is an essential element of problem-solving for new solutions. The following scenario describes such a situation:

Last week, 35-year-old Marvin Manischewitz had been awakened every morning at 7:15 AM to telemarketing phone calls. At first, he was confused about why a major computer company would have customer representatives call every household in the country, but then over the next several days he figured out it was a hoax. Now, once again, he was able to sleep to 7:45 AM and begin his day in peace. How had Marvin determined the calls were not legitimate? He had used critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

The first day of the bogus phone calls, his wife was in a panic because she had answered the phone. He was still mostly asleep when he heard her saying, “I don’t know if we have a service plan on the computer or not. My husband is sleeping. Do you know this is Saturday, sir?”

“Gladys, please hand me the phone.” But when he received it, there was only a dial tone. “Let’s go back to sleep. Maybe catch another 40 or 100 winks?”

When the phone rang again on Monday at 7:30 AM, Marvin told the caller, “This better be very important, or the FCC will be talking to you.” After he listened to about three minutes of the urgent plea to start his computer, follow the instructions, download a patch, and clean off a virus, Marvin said, “I have no intention of doing so until I look into this further; good-bye.”

Later that morning Marvin did a search for phone scams, virus detection, and the current year. Sure enough, he found almost the exact script the caller had been using. He read the background on it and noted the article was from a blog. He looked for online references to the phone scam in newspaper articles and international news sites. Sure enough, he found an Associated Press article on the topic, which confirmed the other postings he had been reading. No need wasting time with these phone calls anymore. Now, going into the online account for their phone service, he knew he could block a phone number from there.

In the digital age, adults frequently use problem-solving skills in the course of their daily lives, recreation, and work. The need for problem-solving is in part because many of these activities are supported by globally distributed technology and are more complex than they used to be. For Marvin, he could not use prior strategies, such as calling the Better Business Bureau, because so many exceptions exist to what they monitor. Instead, he used

some basic technology skills and leveraged them with critical thinking, posing questions about legitimacy and authorship. Once he had finished his investigation as to the validity of the phone calls, he then developed a strategy to stop their intrusion. In the digital age, effective critical thinking and problem-solving skills have become the bedrock of success, and in this case, a better quality of life. Adults need to be adept at challenging their assumptions, considering different possibilities, and synthesizing new understandings in order to navigate the many situations they encounter.

Diversity and Multicultural Skills

In our list of critical opportunities for adult learning in the digital age, diversity and multicultural skills will complete our discussion. Considering the growing diversity of our population and the transparency of global communication, daily life, and work of individuals in the digital work, there are a plethora of multicultural experiences to be had and many forces at work to create our new global world. Not only have demographics shifted (for example, in the 1950s, the US workplace was less diverse by race and gender) but also it was more difficult to conduct international communication, partnerships, and therefore trade. New, scalable, and widely adopted technology has been largely responsible for the changes in the scope of business and communications. When technology innovation was too complex, it could not spread to nontechnical users. However, as the technology platforms and hardware became more user-friendly, more efficient, and less expensive, companies could expect more long-distance clients and partners to have them.

With more international communication emerged the need for organizations and employees to understand and serve different cultures and languages. Thus the multicultural and cross-cultural skills materialized as urgently needed core competencies in the 21st century.

In the previous scenario, Marvin needed many skills to explore the online resources and investigate the phone caller. However, he also needed to be cognizant that the caller might not even be in the United States and could be an offshore service. Understanding the potential international scope of his issue led him through a comprehensive investigative process.

Global citizenry is a newer term for this area of diversity, but it is a very familiar concept. It is the humanistic perspective of respect for people similar and different from you. Certainly, people vary greatly in the degree to which they have needed to exercise their global citizenry skills in the past. However, now we communicate transparently with people around the globe via instant messaging; e-mail; social media; business networking; online learning; and open resources such as MOOCs, MUDs, and MOO program language (i.e., massive open online courses [MOOCs], multi-user dimensions [MUDs], and MUD-object-oriented [MOO]). Living in the digital age, we need to be global citizens so that we are able to understand and address the needs of our multicultural world.

A Different Sort of Experience

By the time my sons were 14 years old, they had good friends in Scotland and Germany whom they exclusively knew through online media. This situation reminded me of when I was that same age and I had a pen pal in France. One of the big differences in our global experiences is that I communicated with my French friend once every few months (we could not afford air mail all the time), whereas my sons not only typed messages weekly but also occasionally spoke together over the computer. To this day, I have never heard my pen pal's voice; I wonder who she was.

Global citizenry in the digital age is ubiquitously needed in our communications and encompasses an entirely different scale of involvement. From picking up the phone and communicating with a telemarketer from India on the other end, to understanding the restrictions experienced by Islamic students in our children's classes, the world is smaller indeed. Chapter 9 will explore each of these key concepts in great detail.

Transformative Learning

The final area to be discussed as essential for adults to be successful in the digital age is transformative learning (TL). TL becomes a powerful perspective and skill set for adults to understand and cope with life in the digital age as they navigate unknown conditions, technologies, conditions, and expectations (Cranton, 1994, 2006; King, 2005, 2009; Mezirow, 1978, 1991; Mezirow & Associates, 2000). Both theoretical discussion and research have driven the development of TL (Cranton, 2006; Freire, 1972, 1973; King, 2005, 2009; Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow & Associates, 2000; O'Sullivan, 1999; Taylor & Cranton, 2012). The approach that is being applied to this work is a holistic one, based on values and beliefs that the beneficial TL focus is one that includes the needs and potential of the whole person.

The TL model is also a stage model. The literature is full of discussions about the TL stages, including their number and nature. Yet, many researchers agree that TL includes adult learners navigating 4 to 11 stages (although not necessarily in an exclusive order): (1) encountering a "disorienting dilemma" (Mezirow, 1978); (2) examining one's feelings of guilt or shame; (3) critically assessing beliefs, values, or assumptions; (4) recognizing that others have navigated the discontent, process of transformation, and change; (5) testing new ways of thinking; (6) planning a course of action that reflects the change; (7) acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to enact the new plan; (8) testing new roles for their fit; (9) renegotiating relationships and negotiating *new* relationships as needed; (10) developing greater competence and confidence in the new roles and relationships;

(11) incorporating the new perspectives, habits of mind, or worldviews into one's life by taking action (King, 2005, 2009; Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow & Associates, 2000; Snyder, 2008; Taylor & Cranton, 2012).

The connections of these stages to the digital age are plentiful. Consider the disorienting dilemmas encountered that require extensive time investments and problem-solving. Those times when it is so difficult to cope with demanding issues and changes may be prime situations for transformative learning. In the same vein, consider the diverse community of our schools and workplaces. Whenever there are struggles in understanding or navigating cultural differences, there exist potential turning points or accelerators of transformative learning. However, at any given point in time, one's openness, readiness, and circumstances greatly influence whether one begins that journey of TL.

Considerations and Complications

In the course of discussing adult learning and the digital age, one cannot forget that there are many issues that must be considered beyond technical troubleshooting. For instance, growing concerns include technology-related ethical considerations, examples of which are ethics, plagiarism, identity theft, cyber theft, cyber forgery, live video surveillance, wearable technologies, and the changing nature of relationships in online spaces.

However, the academic and popular literatures depict a broader scope of concerns:

- Technology or cyber control and the psychology of computation (Turkle, 2005)
- The effect of technology and the Internet on neurodevelopment and intellectual and cultural history (Carr, 2011)
- The impact of technology on our community and relationships (Maushart, 2011)
- The nature of our identity and our relationships with these inanimate objects that dominate our time (Lanier, 2010; Turkle, 2012)
- The potential of a different philosophy to establish users in control (Powers, 2010)

Perhaps not surprisingly, several of these specific books have dominated the nonfiction lists of best reads in recent years. This trend is further evidence that the general public understands not only the proliferation of technology adoption but also the existence of the very real, related issues. My point is that none of these thorny, persistent issues will be effectively addressed and fully explored without the adult learning skills discussed in this chapter. In order to succeed in the digital age, one needs to be invested in adult learning. The activities that are included in each chapter of this book provide focused opportunities for readers to explore that chapter's topics. The different strategies I incorporated in these activities promote critical reflection, questioning, analysis, thoughtful application, meaning making, and more. Ultimately, the activities provide time and space for readers to pause, consider, and develop their personal and professional connections with the reading.

Activity 1.1 Journal

Keeping a journal is beneficial to critically reflect on, interact with, and identify possible applications of the readings. True to the nature of this book, however, I suggest readers consider creating something different than a traditional paper journal or diary. Instead, leverage the tools of the digital age and access the many possibilities for reflective journaling. Consider the range of formats, media, and complexity available.

Benefits of keeping this journal include opportunities to do the following:

- Document your personal and professional growth.
- Articulate, verify, and appreciate your learning journey.
- Scaffold digital age skills and improve your use of digital resources for reflection.
- Develop new instructional ideas.
- Focus on your well-being and development.
- Create a digital self-history.

This list provides suggestions for developing a continuing reflective journal that offers space for contemplating and considering the implications of this book on your personal and professional lives. Select the items that work for you, add anything else you need; however, the main point is to plan and begin your journal so you can participate in the chapter activities and gain the most from your reading experience.

To begin, review the first list and select one or more modes of journaling. Next, consider the “scope of distribution” list and decide which choice best fits your needs. The lists are suggestions; you may certainly use any medium you prefer or a combination of methods.

Nature or Form of Reflective Expression

- Written: on paper, local computer, online, or another medium
- Verbal: digital recording recommended for archive purposes
- Graphic design: computer-based art, painting, sketching, graphic novel, and so on
- Musical: instrumental or vocal recordings
- Movement: role-plays, dance, drama recordings

Scope of Distribution of Your Journal

- Private (locally kept files or documents)
- Small- or large-group (read and discuss the book with a small group or in a class)
- Public (create a public blog to post your reflections)

If you use more than one mode, yours will be a mixed-media journal. That could be very powerful in documenting and communicating your ideas. If you strongly gravitate toward one media, that choice may prove to be an especially effective tool of reflection. These choices are win-win situations. With your choices selected, assemble your materials and begin the journal activity in the next section.

Activity 1.2 An Out-of-Box Experience

Please consider the following scenario and use your journal of choice to record your answers to the questions that follow it.

Julietta brought home her new smartphone and had to figure out how to configure her work and personal e-mail accounts. Next, she explored the online applications store to see which applications could help her keep better track of her work schedule.

Reflective Questions and Prompts

1. Based on this chapter, which types of adult learning do you recognize in Julieta's example? What are your thoughts about those examples?
2. Next, consider those situations in which you use adult learning in relation to technology. Please describe at least two of them in your journal with sufficient detail that a colleague would comprehend the connections.
3. Name and describe which type(s) of adult learning you used in the situations listed in Step 2.
4. Which type of adult learning do you believe you prefer and why? Share some examples and why you think you resonate with that type of learning.
5. Describe two implications of your insights from this activity that can be applied to your current or future professional context.

Conclusion

A lot of ground has been explored in this chapter, from the many different ways that adult learning is used in the digital age to the learning skills needed and the mind-bending complexities that must be considered. Adult learning has become essential in the digital age, yet it seems to be one of the best-kept secrets. There are scores of examples of how technology innovations require people to continue their learning across the life span and

independently use critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Moreover, the complexities of the global, changing world make the coping strategies inherent to transformative learning very valuable to our personal and professional lives. Finally, it is very hard indeed to succeed in the digital age without the foundational skills of technology use, self-discipline, time management, organization, confidence, exploration, and global citizenry.

This chapter has been crafted to welcome readers to the premise, orientation, and perspective of this book. In order for readers to benefit fully from the discussions ahead, it helps greatly to understand the vast number of connections that adult learning has to daily life in this digital age. Moving beyond this beginning, there will be extensive investigation of these topics and more. The goal is for readers to discover how they can best understand and leverage adult learning for their lives as adults, adult learners, and, for some, as educators of adults.