What Did You Mean When You Said Proximity?

Recently before boarding a plane I was tweeting when a tweet coming from Chief Learning Officer, raised the question, “Is there a correlation between proximity and learning outcomes?” Being the CEO of the Global Corporate College, the largest distribution network created to reach incumbent workers where they are, I answered this question without referring to the source material, which was an article on ROI by Bob Mosher. I simply replied, that absolutely proximity matters, and our belief in the importance of understanding the culture, community and environment of the learner was a critical factor in creating a learning experience that achieves the highest level of outcomes. After all, this idea of “proximity” was one of our driving principles for creating the Global Corporate College Network which puts boots on the ground in all 50 states and 30 countries.

Imagine my surprise some weeks later when I actually had the opportunity to read Mosher’s article and learned the reference had to do with the learning experience’s proximity to performance and the impact on ROI. Oh, that proximity.

I went on to read the blog, which focused on performance support, and finally decided that my response about “boots on the ground” was highly relevant. If the goal of those of us who have taken up the mantel for learning that “sticks” is to build learning experience that create measurable ROI results, then we have to be concerned about the proximity of the learning support to the learner.

When we think about stickiness or ROI we must also think about the design and delivery that takes into account the culture, context, and language of the learner. We often think of this as we plan for global design and delivery. This idea about the importance of understanding how to improve the outcomes of global delivery is well addresses by Dr. Kerry Johnson of the Hemsley Fraser Group, in his article “Making Global Programs Feel Local: 10 Guidelines”. In fact, one of the top focuses for global companies with whom we work with at Global Corporate College, is around how they can consistently drive for the same behaviors and skills sets that they believe will garner the greatest positive outcomes around reaching their companies strategic business goals across their large footprints.

So as it relates to proximity, Moser argues that we must pay more attention to the design and deployment of performance support that are available on the job in real time to support application of learning.

Johnson argues that proximity must be focused on good design that takes into account the goals of the learning experience, learning styles of the participant, and the culture of those participants to reach the greatest level of outcomes.

Global Corporate College argues that both Moser and Johnson are correct but they both fall short if they don’t talk about physical proximity and the impact of the facilitator/coach in performance support and in cultural understanding. Let me illustrate with two stories:

Boots on the Ground- Application Coaching Drives Results: A large global manufacturer and retailer in the health and beauty space had a specific goal of taking its newly formed IT shared services group to the next level by improving their internal client driven consultative skills. The organization, fighting time as their barrier, desired to piggyback the learning onto their three regional meetings in the Americas, Asia, and Europe. Because of the diversity of languages spoken in each regional area, the determination was made that the formal IL learning experience would be delivered in English but all participant materials were in the native language of the learner. In addition, field coaching and facilitated social networks was selected as the primary performance support tool to drive application and mastery of new skill sets. Because of Global Corporate College’s “boots on the ground approach”, coaches were in country, understood the cultural nuances around the application of skills and were able to be real time observers of the newly acquired behaviors in action. Proximity Support + Context & Culture + Boots on the Ground = ROI

Boots on the Ground – Preserving the Outcome: A large manufacturer had a clear goal to improve reliability. To that end they worked with one of Global Corporate College’s domestic partners and developed and executed a basic skills training program for non maintenance workers to identify proactively when equipment was not operating correctly thus avoiding shutdowns. The program proved to be significantly successful with a direct correlation to positive ROI. When the company decided they wanted to duplicate the program in another state in another region of the country in the United States, the Global Corporate College “boots on the ground” reviewed the curriculum for context and cultural fit and recognized that the foundational skills for the program to be successful in that location did not exist among the workforce. The “boots on the ground” knew that a high school graduate in their state was highly unlikely to have the basic skills required to maximize the benefit of the learning program and thus the same ROI would likely not be achieved. As a result, the local plant was willing to add two extra weeks to teach the foundational skills thus resulting in an equivalent ROI once the maintenance support program was rolled out to the team. Proximity support + Context & Culture + Boots on the Ground = ROI

At Global Corporate College we believe that proximity matters at all three levels. When you have real “boots on the ground” your training delivery decisions are part of selecting the best methodology to get the results desired. At Global Corporate College we say we are where you are. We should say we are where your learners are. So yes, I stand my original tweet, proximity matters.

Bob Mosher, June 28, 2013 – ROI: It’s all about Proximity
http://www.clomedia.com/articles/roi-it-s-all-about-proximity

Kerry Johnson, Ph.D. Making Global Programs Feel Local: Creating Effective Global Learning Solutions – Hemsley Fraser Group