

Outside The Box



Burn a few bridges— they'll light the way

Kevin Lohan

You've read all the clichés about change so I won't bore you by repeating them.

I do, however, want to encourage you to embrace change like never before. It was a strong theme at the AITD conference and resonated with a lot of people, so if you are truly thinking outside the box, it might just be time to let go of a few things and make a change for a better future.

If I might just indulge myself in one quote from Karen Lamb: "Start now, because in a year from now, you'll wish you had".

What was made clear by speakers at the recent conference was our need to reinvent ourselves because what got us here won't get us 'there' (the future). In case you need prompting, just look at how things have changed in the education industry in the past as a kind of beacon to how the future might look. I realise that for many of us, 1872 might seem a long time ago but back then, teachers were instructed to "fill lamps, clean chimneys and trim wicks each day".

Imagine work instructions to L&D staff that informed you to "empty and clean ashtrays and replace them on the desks of learners in the training room". In my own career, I can vividly recall emptying and cleaning ashtrays that adorned every desk in the training room. It seems so long ago and it's difficult to imagine people openly smoking in a training room now. Yet, there it is. Lamps and wicks of 140 years ago are only a little less odd than ashtrays of just 20 years ago.

Even more recently, I recall the talent for replacing light bulbs in overhead

projectors was quite something. Is there anyone using overhead projectors anymore? In the space of about 10 years they have all become landfill.

What will we be laughing at in another 20 years when we look back at the 2012 training environment? What 'bridges' can you burn today so that you can light the way to your future?

I propose the following.

- Do you really need to print those workbooks? Paperless workplaces were predicted decades ago so why are you still doing that?
- What are you doing with a photocopier? Getting rid of it would be a wrench I bet, but just try to imagine how things would be different without it. What would need to change and could you actually improve your service delivery in a world in which photocopiers did not exist?
- Replace your whiteboards with smart boards. What's that? You don't know what a smart board is? Oops. How embarrassing.
- Better yet, don't have any kind of board—white, smart or even black for that matter.

Try this one! Don't even have a training room. Get rid of that too. Just get rid of it. That will force you to rethink how you deliver the L&D service you are currently offering. You could turn it into a café with

tables that have tablet devices built into the tops and which are hooked directly into a learning portal. Instead of a café loyalty card giving a free coffee for every five purchased you could offer a free coffee for every new mini-learning module successfully completed. A muffin if you do two.

Your L&D staff would acquire new skills as baristas thus equipping them for a new career when L&D folds up completely.

On the other hand, who will train them as baristas and how would that happen? Would you need a training room? Would a whiteboard come in handy? Handouts produced on the trusty copier?

See, all you'd need is an espresso machine. No training room, no handouts and no whiteboard. So it's not really that hard to imagine a training world without many of the trappings we've come to see as essential. Perhaps it's just that the learning you're offering has gone too far away from the basic transfer of skills and into some surreal world.

I once designed a course with no workbook and the client was aghast. "Where's the learning?" she asked in total surprise.

She was so wrapped up in her model of how learning works that no workbook equalled no learning.

I burnt that bridge—in more ways than one! ■

"Outside the Box" is a regular column by Kevin Lohan, principal of Endeavour Training and Development. Kevin can be contacted at www.endeavour.net.au.