



The Adult Learning Model: *Think Like a Child*

by Carl Schoening

Many of you may know I had the very wonderful opportunity to experience fatherhood again a year ago. This has been an incredible year for me. I have enjoyed watching in bewildered awe how my beautiful little girl, Jacy, has grown and learned new things with each passing day. She now only has to watch something being done once for her to try to imitate the action and a few times to master it. This has been mostly a fun experience except when she has watched her mother or I do something around the house that we don't want her to do because it may be dangerous, like plugging in or unplugging an appliance.

I started thinking about how much Jacy has learned in a very short period of time and began wondering why we, as adults, don't have the same desire to learn new things. I have come to the conclusion that we have either forgotten how to learn or that we simply don't want to learn. In either case we are worse off for it.

As our industry continues to evolve we must keep up with the latest technology or be resigned to always do things as we have traditionally done them, becoming stagnant and letting the industry and profit opportunity pass us by. I suppose that it could be that our curiosity and wonder of the world has become diluted by our daily grind, urgency to produce and belief that we have mastered all we need to know. It brings me back to the industry's grassroots themes like perpetual learning, ongoing technological evolution and breakthrough innovation to advance the use of building components.

A few weeks ago I was stunned as Jacy took her first steps and is now scurrying about playing and learning every day. By watching her, I have noticed that the process of learning something new begins with the first step, the first sense that there is something new to learn and movement toward that knowledge. Now when I leave the house to head to the office or airport, I stop in on Jacy and get that reminder. I embark on each day with a renewed sense of wonder and look forward to finding new skills and mastering those things I have learned. It makes my days full and fulfilling. Everything seems fresh and every experience—no matter how frequently performed—is a life lesson.

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I challenge each of you to watch children at play and relearn how to learn. Keep an open mind and don't let adult logic keep you from experiencing the wonders of the world. Recently I was told about an experiment that a highly regarded business consultant performed:

He visited a kindergarten classroom and on the blackboard (well, really a white dry erase board...just one more thing to make you feel the march of time) he placed a dot. Without further explanation he asked the children, "What is that?" Hands flew up all over the room. One said it was a star in the sky, another said it was a freckle, another

Continued on page 90

Have we forgotten how to learn as adults? Teach yourself to learn by thinking like a child.

at a glance

- ☐ If you look at your business through the eyes of a child, will you see things differently?
- ☐ Become an idea guy, here's how.



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Continued from page 88

said it was a bug and still another said it was a telephone pole...looking at it from the top. Every child had used their imagination and determined the dot's identity, unbridled by logic and unhindered by fear that they may be incorrect. Then he performed the same experiment for a classroom of high school seniors. He asked the same question and not a single hand went up. He continued to ask the question and finally a single hand went up. The student said, "It's a dot." Then another hand, same answer. Pretty soon everyone was answering "dot."

From this experiment we learn several things. The most important is that as we age, we forget how to use our imagination. We look at things with a narrow field of vision that keeps us from recognizing opportunities to learn. We forget that the world is not static, it continues to evolve and we must do so as well. And so must our industry.

How many times have we looked at our business and said, "Yup, that's how it is supposed to be done," yet we expect different results even though we continue to do things the same way as always. Take the time to look at every process through the eyes of a child, asking "why" at each turn. Find out how our processes came to be the way they are and look for the opportunity to learn a new way or method that will improve our businesses. The revolutionary ideas do sometimes jump out, but they must also be searched for. Keeping an open mind about our world helps us recognize an idea that may be buried under habit.

A few months ago I had an epiphany. It seems those types of things always happen to me when I least expect it, usually when I am experiencing the best sleep I can remember. It always turns out to be worth it, but a little irritating when it happens, mainly because I can never get back to sleep. I have learned that in a sleep state, our minds are less burdened and more willing to solve a problem unaided by conventional logic. In this way it is the most child-like. My challenge has been to bring that same "free thinking" to my conscious mind; watching Jacy grow and learn has helped me do that.

I am reminded of a part in a movie when an actor is explaining why he carries around a small recording device. He says, "I'm an idea guy." He goes on to talk about how he doesn't have control over it and that he is bombarded by ideas all day long and records them immediately so that he doesn't forget. Most of us can be Idea Guys, but we have learned to block out new ideas. We have forgotten how to learn and have mostly closed the door to the amazing process that leads to new ideas. To improve our businesses and this industry we must go back to



the open mind approach or, in other words, think like a child. **SBC**

Jacy Schoening tells us that her daddy is Vice President of Sales and Marketing for Truswal Systems Corporation in Arlington, TX.

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