

## REMAINING OPEN TO CONTINUOUS LEARNING

By Arthur L. Costa and Bena Kallick

*"All of the top achievers I know are lifelong learners... looking for new skills, insights and ideas. If they're not learning, they're not growing...not moving toward excellence."*

*Denis Waitley*

Successful people are in a continuous learning mode. Their confidence, in combination with their curiosity allows them to constantly search for new and better ways to learn and improve. They seek feedback on their work --always growing, always learning, always modifying and improving themselves. They seize problems, situations, tensions, conflicts and circumstances as valuable opportunities to learn.

For some people, feedback represents a threat to what they know. They fear that new information will get in the way of their work rather than help them to improve their work. They confront new learning opportunities with fear rather than mystery and wonder. They seem to feel better when they have the certainty of knowing rather than the uncertainty of learning new ideas. They defend their biases, beliefs, and storehouses of knowledge rather than inviting the unknown, the creative and the inspirational. Perhaps some of us are afraid that if we admit our ignorance or confusion, peers and teachers will think we are a failure, that we are inadequate or stupid. On the one hand they know they must learn how to learn, but they are afraid to admit it. Being certain and closed gives them comfort while being ambiguous, doubtful and open gives them fear. However, when we are closed, we are not open to new questions, new ideas, and discovering our own new capacities and innovations. Yet what we are seeing in today's workplace is that workers

value and appreciate weekly, even daily feedback from supervisors instead of more formal annual performance reviews. Companies are ditching annual reviews for real-time feedback (Kiplinger, 2015). They recognize that continuous learning is far better than a single evaluation at the end of the year.

Remaining open to continuous learning is an essential characteristic of self-directed, continual, life-long learners and should be nurtured both at home and in school. Self-directed, continuous learners are “addicted” to feedback. This implies that they actively gather and interpret feedback through self-observation by consciously monitoring their own feelings, attitudes, and skills; by inviting feedback from teachers parents and peers, through interviews with others, and by collecting evidence showing the effects of their own efforts. These data are then analyzed, interpreted, and internalized. Based on this analysis, self-directed learners, modify their actions to more closely achieve their goals. Thus, they become continually self-managing, self-monitoring, and self-modifying (Costa & Kallick, 1995 p. 27).

Our vision is of creative students and people who are eager to learn. That includes the humility of knowing what we don't know, which is the highest form of thinking we will ever learn. Paradoxically, unless you start off with humility, you will never get ahead. As the first step you have to have the crowning glory of all learning: the humility to know--and admit when you don't know-- and not be afraid to find out by asking questions and seeking feedback.

As Nobel Prize winning physicist Richard Feynman said, “We need to teach how doubt is not to be feared but welcomed. It's OK to say, ‘I don't know.’”

**References:**

Costa, A & Kallick, B. (1995 ) *Assessment in the Learning Organization*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD

*The Kiplinger Letter*, Oct 16, 2015. Vol 92, No 42 p 1 Washington DC: Kiplinger.com