

## Spotlight on Dr Dean Spitzer

If Dr Dean Spitzer is right, the role of the trainer is set for dramatic change. What's more, he has a critical question: 'Will you be ready?' Spitzer, who lives in Florida, USA, is a consultant, researcher and strategist with the IBM Corporation. He will be giving the keynote speech, 'Maximising business performance through training and development', at this year's World of Learning Conference and Exhibition (WOLCE). 'I want to get training professionals to look more proactively at the new world of learning,' he says. 'Learning has not evolved very much over the last 5,000 years. Though we may use new technology, the basic pedagogy has not changed since Biblical times' – an apt reference point for a man who is something of a prophet in his own times. 'We are not dealing with the traditional, blue collar paradigm; most employees today are knowledge workers – those who are paid to think and solve problems. When you go into a shop, your expectations are high these days: you want those working there to be proactive, to take the initiative, to help you solve your problem, not follow a training script.'

So why has the world of training been so slow to react to this shift? 'It's down to a lack of clear visionary leadership,' claims Spitzer. 'People who have gravitated into training and development are not usually very business orientated. Rather than be pathfinders of learning, they have been led by their organisations. I want to encourage people in our field to be much more creative and business orientated. It is a matter of thinking differently. This is a new world of learning and we need existing trainers and developers to move into this world.'

How can they make this move? Working for IBM might lead you to think that Spitzer sees his company as a role model for all to follow. 'Although IBM is on the leading edge, it is not a matter of copying other companies,' warns Spitzer. 'Every organisation has its own needs,' he says, but emphasises that there are common challenges facing these organisations regardless of their size or power. This includes, he says, a 'tectonic shift' in the way people are viewed. 'Training programmes teach people the same way to do things but we are moving into a world where we want people to think for themselves. We are looking to a future where learning becomes an integral feature of their everyday working situation. At the moment, there is a time for training and a time for working; this will break down. And all this means that a very different type of learning professional must emerge.'

Isn't he setting the bar for trainers rather too high? 'The "hurdles" are more conceptual than anything else,' he responds. 'The problem is envisioning the future, then selling the ideas to the key decision makers in the organisation. The importance of conferences such as WOLCE is to give training professionals the vision that can be taken back to the key business decision makers.'

If all this sounds a little too visionary, Spitzer's view is that the time for change is right now and is already happening in organisations like IBM which, he says, is in the process of dismantling many of its 20,000 'off-the-peg' menu courses. 'We have to get away from the catalogue culture of training. We used to have 10 per cent on-the-job learning; we are moving towards shifting this to 80 per cent.' Why 80 per cent? 'Employees have told me that most of what they learn, they learn informally on the job. Eighty per cent of what is valuable is learnt in this way. So all we are doing is making the learning infrastructure match what is actually happening at the workplace.'

It sounds easy, but Spitzer recognises the organisational barriers to change: 'The first thing is to encourage managers to understand that when people are learning together, they are not chatting and wasting time. We have to change the structure consistent with this. We have to change the mindset of managers who want everything the traditional way. Existing budgeting and resources have to be changed, too.' Spitzer believes that learning professionals need to be champions of this change and will be asking that vital question at WOLCE: are YOU ready?

The learning revolution: some of Dean Spitzer's key predictions

- \* Learning will continue to move out of the classroom into the workplace.
- \* Learning will not just occur anytime and anywhere, but will occur all the time and everywhere.
- \* Technology will be a more transparent enabler of learning, and you won't have to be a technician to use it.
- \* Learning will be focused on optimising organisational outcomes, rather than on managing inputs, activities and outputs.
- \* Learning will be tightly aligned with business priorities.
- \* Learning strategies will be more holistic and enterprise-wide, rather than silo-based.
- \* Learning will be instrumental to all organisational change, and organisational change will be constant.
- \* Learning will be more organisational and less individual; learning in teams will be more common.
- \* Learning will be just-in-time, rather than just-in-case.
- \* Learning will be more productive and less wasteful, because it will use more shared resources and less duplication of resources.
- \* Learning will be integrated with performance, not separate from an adjunct to work.
- \* Learning for knowledge work will replace learning from traditional work as the dominant paradigm, and it will require a whole new way of thinking about performance.

© Training Journal 2006