Gamification—The Next Big Thing!

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Should work be fun and games? If not work, how about learning and development? Gamification has made the leap from the recreational world to the work world. But is it fun without substance? If it is done right, gaming can be a great way to reinforce concepts learned in the classroom. And for the younger generation coming up through the ranks, it is a medium they are used to and comfortable with. When the learning process requires players to apply knowledge in a game setting, employees are engaged while building and reinforcing skills. We are excited at MRA to have recently launched Excellence Island, a learning game that specifically supports key concepts in our Principles of Leadership Excellence Series. Early players of the game have seen the value of reviewing these key concepts as part of a fun way to apply what they have learned in a safe setting.

Of course, skill building and learning happens in many ways. At Wixon, a Wisconsin company that creates and makes flavoring products for a wide variety of customers, they talk about their secret ingredient being their employees. Wixon places a high value on employee development. They have worked hard to identify gaps in skills and knowledge and set up programs—both on-the-job and formal training—to close those gaps. They are building a well-trained workforce while growing engaged employees at the same time.

The new year offers the opportunity to consider how you can be more efficient with your time, how you can work smarter, and how you can learn more, in order to be more successful moving forward. Let us know how MRA can help.

by Linda Hildebrand
Linda Hildebrand is Manager of Training Operations at MRA and Editor of the The Institute of Management Journal.

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Gamification—
The Next Big Thing!

by Jan Stoffer
Jan Stoffer is a Training Manager in MRA’s Institute of Management. Jan can be reached at 262.696.3512 or janet.stoffer@mranet.org.
Usually the first thing you’re told in a training class is to shut off your devices, but what if, instead, the instructor told you to keep them on and use them? With the increase of gamification in learning, that may be happening more and more.

You may have heard the term “gamification,” but what exactly is it? The term can apply to a variety of things such as games that customers might play on a website to interact with a company’s products or online training that uses interactive quizzes and competition. But the reason for all the recent excitement is that there is great potential for what is usually referred to as game-based learning and serious learning games—a learning experience that is structured around the concept of a competitive game.

There is no doubt that video games are here to stay. It’s probably a safe bet that at this very moment, millions of people are playing games in one form or another. They have become a significant part of our lives, and as younger generations spend more and more time gaming it is important to understand why people play games and how they affect the users. One of the definitive books on the subject is Jane McGonigal’s bestseller Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World. She argues that games, if designed and used correctly, have the potential to make the user more successful, happier, and, at larger scales through mass collaboration, can have the potential to really change the world.

Workplace gamification is a relatively new concept. Companies and organizations are now looking at gamification to help solve organizational issues such as employee engagement, learning, and collaboration. The concept of gamification is more than just game playing in the workplace—it is about practicing skills for workplace success to achieve an end result of enhanced productivity and development.

Game-based learning experiences have been around for years in classroom workshop settings, where learners are divided into teams and learn by competing against each other in a game or sophisticated simulation, such as running a business or climbing a mountain. But now, this kind of simulation has evolved to an online format. Learning games allow the participant to not only learn concepts and skills, but to put them into practice as part of the game, receiving continuous and personalized feedback as they progress through the game. It is cost effective, the learner can move at his or her own pace and time schedule, and the learning process is completely individualized. Learning games also help the learner learn from failure. It’s totally fine to fail in a game. Though failure is an inherent part of learning, failing on the job is expensive.

**Effective Skill Building**

An essential component in any learning program is how effective it is in developing the skills it is designed to impart. For skills-based learning, internalizing complex new behaviors to improve performance requires hours of practice in a safe environment, with real-world scenarios and personalized learner feedback. Game-based learning provides this.

Due to the repetitive nature of the skills practice in games there is a much higher likelihood of not only increased competence in the trained skills, but a higher level of confidence in using them on the job.

**Retention of Skills**

Games generally use superior learning models to create more memorable training that increases knowledge retention and improves skill proficiency. Effective learning games can dependably deliver superior outcomes.

As participants play the game, hours of active practice provide the opportunity to hone the new skills. The competitive nature of gaming encourages the learner to become highly proficient in applying the skill in order to achieve a high score. The high amount of personalized feedback and reinforcement and the fact that games are just plain fun promotes a positive attitude towards the concepts being learned.

That’s why MRA added a gamification component to its highly acclaimed Principles of Leadership Excellence Series.

Gamification is the next big thing in workplace learning!
MRA’s Principles of Leadership Excellence Series Adds Gamification Component

Gamification has the potential to make huge strides in solving one of the most persistent challenges of online learning—that employees don’t complete the program because they don’t find it engaging, relevant, or worth their time.

**Gamification overcomes the challenges of:**
1. Engagement
2. Effective skill building
3. Retention of skills

MRA’s new and innovative Principles of Leadership Excellence Series includes a learning game to support participants in practicing and further developing their leadership skills through motivation, coaching, training, delegating, and making task assignments.

In MRA’s game, Excellence Island, participants take the role of the leader of a team that has been shipwrecked on a deserted island. The compelling storyline includes the goal to help the 13 members of the team survive and ultimately get off the island. As participants play through the game levels they learn to assess their employees’ competence in terms of their aptitude and attitude, then they must decide on the correct leadership direction that will help the team overcome a series of increasingly difficult challenges. While the challenges occur in a fun tropical setting, they mirror the challenges that all leaders face and are parallel to concepts taught in the PLX series. As the game progresses, the team members develop new skills and, if the leader is successful in leading and developing the team, he or she will be successful in safely leaving the island. The game begins with a simple tutorial and is supported by in-class instruction and an MRA video developed to help get players up to speed. The game is accessed on a computer, tablet, or a smartphone and can be played in short bursts of time—ideal for the busy leader who wants to follow the game but doesn’t have long uninterrupted periods of time. Progress is saved and the leader can jump right back in and continue the game.

Learning games are not only for the young! The Entertainment Software Association reports that the average age of “gamers” is 37 and 25 percent of video game players are 50 years old or older. Gamification experts agree that age is not a barrier to using learning games. If learners find training interesting, fun, compelling, and applicable to their jobs, they place a high value on it.
Solving Mystery Emails

*It’s Elementary, My Dear Watson*

Sometimes when I’m reading a confusing email, I wish that I lived in London at 221C Baker Street. If that was home, I could walk next door to 221B to enlist the help of my neighbor, Mr. Sherlock Holmes. Master of deduction, Holmes would furrow his brow, peruse the mystery email, and deduce the sender’s exact intent. It would be grand to have him peering over my shoulder. I’d be certain whether the email is a request for action from all 10 of the people listed in the “to” field or if it’s simply informational. Holmes could be instrumental in preventing me from pressing “delete” when an email is a mystery like this one:

**To:** Social Committee  
**Subject:** Update  
Hi, all. The other day I was chatting with Dan about a customer appreciation event. We need another project to do, right? Maybe something like 4-6 in the new warehouse. Party-to-Go could supply decorations or even some fun games. But maybe the warehouse renovation won’t be done by then. We’ll probably have a good turnout. Dan’s been looking at the budget. There’s a great inspirational speaker that Joan (she’s the new person in Accounting) heard at a Rotary meeting. Cost is a factor. Thursday’s our deadline.

**Focusing on a few important steps will help you avoid sending mystery emails:**

- Write a meaningful subject line, brief but informational.
- Use simple language and clearly state your purpose. Ensure that you’ve included who, what, when, where, why.
- Don’t leave your readers guessing. Specify who should take action, especially if you’re sending to multiple people and/or if you have cc’d others.
- Avoid sarcasm. No one can hear your tone of voice or see your smile.
- Use white space to add clarity to your message and add white space that helps readability.

Applying these tips to the mystery email creates an email without the mystery:

**To:** Social Committee  
**Subject:** Please review in preparation for this Monday’s meeting  
At our last meeting about the Customer Appreciation event, I volunteered to finalize the location, check on the budget, and find two program options for us to consider before our next meeting. Here’s what I found:

Location: I got the OK to use the reception area at the entrance to the new warehouse. If the renovation isn’t finished, we can use the second floor conference room.

Budget: The accounting department has allocated a total of $1000. Food will cost about $500. We could spend the rest on a great speaker I learned about, or we could hire Party-to-Go to provide decorations and some fun games.

Think about which you’d prefer. We’ll make a final decision at our next meeting this coming Monday, January 27 at 11 a.m. Check with me ahead of time with any questions about the two options we’ll vote on.

The Bottom Line  
When written well, an email saves time and moves an issue along quickly. We’re all in hurry to get to the next item on our to-do list, but an email written in haste is more likely to muddle things up than clarify. Following some simple guidelines is, well, elementary.

by Nancy Caldwell

Nancy Caldwell is a Writing Specialist at MRA and may be reached by email at nancy.caldwell@mranet.org.
Close your eyes and imagine munching on snacks with flavors like tequila lime, sweet and salty praline, or corn on the cob. Dream of delving into a bacon, mushroom, and Swiss cheese dip. Visualize your taste buds smiling with supreme satisfaction over meat prepared with flavorful marinade. Yum. Welcome to the world of Wixon.

**High-Tech Meets Tasty**
Among the 220 lucky folks who work at this tasty operation, some hold typical business positions. But the sprawling, multi-building campus in St. Francis, Wisconsin, also houses flavor chemists, meat scientists, food technologists, and sensory experts. Complete and sophisticated research and development labs, liquid and dry manufacturing facilities, and packaging operations play a key role in this worldwide taste-treat. The 4,200-square-foot Innovation Center for Culinary and Meat Processing includes a demonstration kitchen and a flavor lab. There’s even a Meat Pilot Plant for Wixon’s customers to test new products just as if they were on their own production lines.

**Seasoning and Flavor System Solutions**
“While our name isn’t on the products we sell, we create new, unforgettable flavors that customers can’t live without,” explained Ed Becerra, Vice President of Operations. “The largest segment of our business is building products for customers who then place our flavor creations in items they sell to consumers. We also create and package foods for well-known brand names that go directly to the consumer.” Customers partner with Wixon from concept to consumption or any point in between, including arenas like the meat industry, restaurant chains, and food service operators.

**Sprung From Stockyard Spice**
Producing the cutting-edge food, technology, and ingredient products that today’s discerning consumers demand is light years away from Wixon’s humble beginnings. The company’s expertise goes back more than 100 years, begun in 1907 by company founder Charles Wixon, who prepared spices by night and delivered them by day to Chicago’s sausage makers. In contrast, today’s operation creates a thousand new flavor systems and seasonings every year. Customers tap into a portfolio of services, including R&D, custom formulation development, turnkey solutions, and menu ideations—all backed by an award-winning company with accreditations by the highest authorities for quality standards.

**Revealing the Secret Ingredient**
“Wixon does have a secret ingredient,” shared Sandy Jaskulski, Vice President of Administration. “And we’re happy to tell everyone about it,” she added with a smile. “That secret ingredient is our employees.” Wixon’s leaders work hard to help employees develop the hands-on skills necessary to do their jobs, and they pay keen attention to building interpersonal skills as well.

“Over the last three years, we’ve taken our employee development to a higher level,” noted Jaskulski. “Analyzing the reasons for employee turnover was the key. We reviewed the training that individuals
received, and we found that there was a gap in what employees were trained to do and what they actually needed to do, particularly when they moved into a leadership role.” Becerra added, “We identified what we believed were the major gaps and the kind of formal training and on-the-job training that would get us where we needed to be. Realizing that a well-developed workforce is necessary to achieve world-class performance standards, we really needed to beef things up. So we took strong action.”

Allocating Internal Resources
Creating two, full-time training positions over a year ago was a vital step to ensure that employees know what they need to do on a day-to-day basis. “We started with emphasis on our operations divisions—like plant managers and operations managers, and sales directors, and now we’re expanding it to the entire workforce,” said Becerra. Company leaders estimate about five years of intensive work is needed before skills training may be able to move into a maintenance mode. “We anticipate a full-time, internal effort for the foreseeable future,” he added.

Partnership With MRA
With on-the-job, skills-based training for manufacturing employees under way, Wixon turned to its partnership with MRA to add formal classroom training. For those in operations and logistics positions, training began with foundation programs such as time management, problem solving, and performance assessment.

November 2013 marked the first group of employees to complete MRA’s Leading Effective Teams Certificate Series. “We see a major improvement—a real culture change—occurring as a benefit to the formal training MRA provides,” noted Jaskulski.

“The skills they learn are reflected in how employees think, how they deal with problems, and how they deal with one another,” agreed Becerra. “And employees appreciate the training. They see the merit, and they’re willing to implement what they’ve learned. We couldn’t ask for a better return on our investment.”

Research and innovation, coupled with a well-trained workforce, drive creative solutions for customers. Stir in scientific and culinary capabilities, mix in a passion for service, and the future bodes well for Wixon. It’s guaranteed to be a very tasty future, indeed.

by Nancy Caldwell
Nancy Caldwell is a Writing Specialist at MRA and may be reached by email at nancy.caldwell@mranet.org.
People matter and relationships cannot be handled like tasks on a priority list. Time matters and you need to get things done. Be ruthless with time, gracious with people. Here are five tips to help you make the most of your time while maintaining and building relationships in 2014.

1. The “Plus One” tip.
How often does someone say to you, “Have a second?” or “Have a minute?” The fact is the person never needs just one second or just one minute. When you are on a tight schedule and don’t have a big chunk of time to give someone, try this approach. Ask, “How much time do you really need?” Get a number… 3, 4, 6, 10 minutes. Set the expectation by saying you have that amount of time but not “plus one” additional minute. For example, if the person asks for 5 minutes, you say, “I have 5, not 6, minutes.” Or for 7 minutes, you say, “I have 7, not 8, minutes.” That’s the “plus one” technique. As you probably have experienced, people often go longer. When they do, here’s what you say: “I had 5, not 6, minutes and this is too important to rush—we’ll have to schedule some time. I’m available at…” The key phrase is, “…this is too important to rush.” Then stick to your word and schedule the extra time later.

2. The “90 Seconds” tip.
Many people, if treated like Employee 07938 instead of an individual, will begin looking for another job. This is especially true when dealing with a people person. The “90 seconds” tip is that you allow about 90 seconds, on occasion, for chit-chat. In this world, positive relationships produce positive results.

3. The “Just Start” tip.
Have you ever noticed, it is so easy to NOT find time to do things you don’t want to do in the first place? Procrastination—it gets the better of you. When procrastinating you may think, “I’ll wait for the motivation to come, then I’ll start this thing I don’t want to do.” Often, the simple act of just starting a task provides the motivation to finish the task. The “just start” tip is just that: Quit waiting for motivation—get started and motivation to finish will come to you.

4. The “80/20” tip.
Do you know the Pareto Principle or the “80/20” rule? The concept is that life isn’t fair—a small portion of the things you do yield big results and a lot of the things you need to do yield much smaller results. Here’s how to identify those few things that have a bigger return on investment. Ask yourself, “What key tasks am I not spending enough time on—tasks that would make a HUGE difference—if only I had time to do them?” Once you’ve identified those tasks, you’re beginning to use the “80/20” tip. Then it’s time for action. Try this: Instead of prioritizing your schedule try scheduling your priorities for one hour a day. If that doesn’t work, try scheduling your priorities two to three hours a week. That’s how you turn the 80/20 tip into action.

5. The “Anticipate Interruptions” tip.
Studies show that most people can only proactively schedule about half of the time in their work day. The other half must be available for reactive tasks—those things that must be done to keep processes running smoothly. You will be interrupted daily. Anticipate interruptions and don’t beat your head against the wall trying to over-schedule your day.

Time is too important to waste—make the most of it!

by Joe Feest
Joe Feest is a Training Manager and Instructor in MRA’s Institute of Management. Contact Joe at 262.696.3429 or joseph.feest@mranet.org
Employee Development Pays Off

One of the most significant managerial activities is developing staff skills to perform jobs properly and ensure company success both today and in the future. Many managers, however, have lost capable staff members because they did not take the time to understand their career and development goals, did not take the time to give straight feedback that could have been crucial to career growth, or were unable to provide them with development opportunities beyond occasional attendance at a training program.

Research on workforce trends clearly indicates that development is a critical element in attracting and retaining talent. The best and the brightest are being heavily recruited while many employers report that the overall skill level of the new workforce is on the decline. MRA survey data indicates that one-quarter of white-collar employees in both union and union-free work environments are not satisfied with their development opportunities. If all this is true, the result of losing even one or two of your best employees can have a devastating effect on a department or even a company.

by Steve Kessel
Steve Kessel is Training Manager and Instructor in MRA’s Institute of Management. Contact Steve at 262.696.3642 or steve.kessel@mranet.org.

What does it take to successfully coach your employees and assist them in their development?

Find out what they want to do.
Ask your employees, “What are your career goals over the next five years?” Don’t assume that your employee see the same career path as you do. You need to carefully listen to your employees’ rationale, their assessment of their own skill level as it relates to how they think they are viewed by others, and their assessment of company culture and direction.

Find out how committed they are to their career goals. It’s one thing to set goals but an entirely different thing to have the level of personal commitment to act on those goals over the long term. Some coaches describe commitment as the level of energy the individual is willing to put forth on looking at their own skills/abilities critically, seeking feedback from others, breaking old habits and learning new patterns of behavior. Development is hard work that requires the active participation of the employee.

Help your employees select their top priorities.
Because development is hard work and requires time and energy, managers should ensure that employees have a clear focus on a limited number (one or two) of development priorities. Look for opportunities to mesh personal goals with company needs.

Help employees develop an action plan.
A well-constructed development plan will directly support your employees’ top priorities and make use of different methods of learning new skills. While on-the-job assignments are generally considered to be the best way to develop skills, training programs/seminars, books, and CDs/DVDs can also be of value. When using methods such as training programs, employees may need some coaching on how what was learned in the classroom can be applied on the job. Even on-the-job failures can be valuable learning experiences when the manager helps the employee reflect on the situation and what could have been done differently to achieve desired results.

Employee development is crucial to the success of the business. It cannot be left to chance, but needs to be carefully planned by the employee, with effective coaching from the manager. While requiring both commitment and resources, effective development leads to improved business results as well as a company’s ability to attract and retain the best employees.
Imagine making the transition from being a successful race car driver who competed for the Ford Motor team at Le Mans and winning the British and European Saloon Car championships to an equally successful author of an easy-to-read, easy-to-use handbook on coaching employees for performance.

Imagine taking concepts first developed for coaching athletes to improve performance and applying those same concepts in a business setting. In a nutshell these are the underpinnings of Coaching for Performance by Sir John Whitmore.

Whitmore pioneered what he refers to as the “GROW” model of coaching as both a thought sequence and conversational template for coaching almost anyone about almost anything.

The first step, according to Whitmore, is to make sure the person being coached, the coachee, has a stated goal in mind. He defines goals as having two ingredients:
1. An aspirational goal—the ultimate outcome being sought.
2. A behavioral goal—the next step (or the first step) toward achieving the ultimate goal.

The elegance of this concept is that the coachee is forced to imagine a future state that, initially, may seem unreachable. At the same time, through the coaching conversation, the coachee is aided in determining what is a logical beginning to his or her pursuit of the ultimate goal.

The second step examines the reality of the current situation. A golfer who, for example, finds himself averaging 40 putts per 18 holes of golf might have an ultimate goal of not exceeding 32 putts per round. Common sense predicts that trying to achieve a 20 percent improvement in one step would likely create a daunting situation that would result in a lack of success, frustration, and an abandonment of the goal in short order.

That same person, however, who had an intermediate goal of going from 40 to 38 putts average per round would likely see the goal as attainable. And it is the attainability of the initial and each subsequent goal that makes it motivational.

Options are the next logical step in the process. It is here that the coach asks good, powerful, open questions designed to help the coachee raise awareness of current behaviors that might promote goal attainment as well as identifying current behaviors that might interfere with or prevent goal attainment. The coachee, through discussion with the coach, seeks to identify behaviors that can be implemented to assist in moving toward that initial goal. Perhaps studying a successful golfer, spending more time practicing, or using a putter more suited to the coachee’s style of putting. The key is that the coachee develop the option(s) that work most effectively rather than the coach “hijacking” the conversation and telling the coachee what needs to be done.

Most individuals learn best by personal experience. And most have learned more from the failures in their lives than from their successes. Personal mistakes cannot be shared—each individual must make their own.

Finally, the conversation needs to be wrapped up. The wrap-up, sometimes referred to as the “will” to change, should result in a defined action plan the coachee executes before the next coaching conversation. The goal should include all the elements of SMART goals—be specific, measurable, be seen and felt as attainable, it has to be results oriented, and with time limits included and clearly stated.

Whitmore’s book is easy to read, not filled with jargon, and based on years of experience with the concepts and methodology. It first appeared in 1992 and has stood the test of time. The concepts are affordable, and offer a process that any leader can deploy effectively and efficiently within the course of a normal work week.

Coaching for Performance by John Whitmore

by Bob Unke
Bob Unke is Senior Training and Development Manager at MRA’s Institute of Management. Contact Bob at 262.696.3532 or bob.unke@mranet.org
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Project Management—Top Five Things to Know

It’s a new year and time for you to get ready for the next project on your to-do list. As I was researching advice on project management success, I came across a blog entry that linked to a book titled, *97 Things Every Project Manager Should Know* by Barbee Davis. I kid you not! That seems like way too many things to ask someone to remember. I, instead, have chosen to share five key takeaways about successful project managers. Remember these!

1. **Work with your project sponsor to get some flexibility in the project’s timeline, budget, and scope.** If you allow all three of these high level project objectives to be fixed points, you are setting your team up for problems. Ask that only one be fixed, and the other two to have some flexibility.

2. **Be the servant leader of your team.** A servant leader helps the team reach success through coaching, motivating, facilitating, negotiating, and showing empathy. The servant leader is not in charge, but rather serves as the team’s enabler. Enable is a transitive verb, meaning to supply with the means, knowledge, or opportunity—to make able. Use your skills in project oversight to help these team members complete the work.

3. **Take care of yourself.** When you are in charge, you have a tendency to want to push to the limit. It is easy to overdo it! Remember that your team is relying on you to be healthy and energized. You cannot do that if you burn the proverbial candle at both ends. (Also see item #5.)

4. **Know your goal and be able to convince everyone that this goal is real and achievable.** If you do not think it is, then it is not. A wise manager once said, “Do not overpromise and under deliver.” You may have to do some intense negotiations with your project sponsor and key stakeholders to get to a real and achievable goal. The Project Management Institute says more than half of all projects fail to deliver on the agreed-upon goal. *Achievable* is the key word here.

5. **Ask for help—don’t wait.** You’ve been taught to be self-reliant and to take care of yourself. In project management, you are best served by surrounding yourself with the very best subject matter experts you can find. Enable these people to practice their talents, so your needs will be served. They will come through for you every time!

*Jodi McMahon is Quality and Productivity Manager in MRA’s Institute of Management. Contact Jodi at 262.696.3352 or jodi.mcmahon@mranet.org*
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Frontline Leadership Skills

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Annual Employment Law Update

Illinois and Federal February 6, 2014
Iowa and Federal February 20, 2014
Wisconsin and Federal February 28, 2014
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