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Critique of Paul Drexler- Bechtel Presentation

Paul Drexler is an award winning Community of Practice founder and a safety

program problem solutions worker (I read in the handout that he was not a

manager as I had thought) at Bechtel, a large corporation whose mission is to

dismantle weapons of mass destruction and do clean up, according to him. On

opening, he asked each of us to share what our interests and goals in the

program were and it was fun to hear the make-up of our student body. I

recorded this event and as I listen again, it seems the class took him quite

seriously at the start.

We were all excited to listen, as his handout boasts that as an individual

contributor without any managerial authority he was able to introduce and help

to implement new learning solutions including: 1) an award winning online safety

simulation; 2) a learning game; 3) a Learning 2.0 with active contributions from

the field; 4) an award winning Community of Practice which improved safety; and

5) a 3D mobile rigging simulation and game for the iPad.   With such an

impressive list of accomplishments, we were eager to learn. Unfortunately we did

not get to see or experience four out of five of these technological programs or

devices.

He continued his presentation with a Power Point True or False Quiz to present quotes from a few experts in this field, and then disagreed with all, claiming that in his opinion their quotes were all false. At this point, I am thinking that Paul was not an expert in the field himself and knows little about teaching people how to learn, but is instead a self made man who made a difference as a problem solver in his work around safety issues at Bechtel.

We spent a little time on John V.W. Buie's *PainPowerFit Results Now* program, which basically states that resources and attention should only be invested on sure things that require cause for action, and when the power of authority and sources of cash recognizes an urgency to act, then the action *fits* as a suitable change proposal with a comparative advantage.

This is my summary of *PainPowerFit* program: a) The only changes that can happen are those that are readily recognizable as wins; b) If it's messy, as is changing the conditions that cause war, or changing the condition of the unemployed, it won't comply within the criteria for this program. To me, this method is for cronies looking for some success stories under their belt, more

than it is for resolving real down and dirty problems, like getting all of the

contamination out of Pt. Richmond Naval Yard, or Iraq, etc.

As Paul walks us through his "Community of Practice", we learn that 15% of the

participants are allowed to contribute information about safety and 85% can ask

questions, receive and make comments. I guess in a way it is a place for safety

people to go for information needed on the job, and that is a great tool.   But I

am not clear that people are collaborating and forwarding the action on new

developments in the field, nor able to make an impact or change the field in any

way.

From there on out, he proceeded to denigrate the field.   The more I realize he is

not officially trained for HPT, nor has held a position in that area, the more I

realize his need to make a contribution talking about developing his Community

of Practice for those who work in the safety department, a department he worked

in for 40 years. And he has been acknowledged for making that contribution by

the awards, and kudos gotten on the job. However upon inquiry about what the

opportunities at Bechtel are for the youth of today, he flatly stated they would

not have the same opportunities as he, moving into the future.

What started out to be a inspiring presentation, I am afraid spiraled downhill from there, but not for lack of enthusiasm in sharing his projects, more for the arrogance of presenting a point of view that suggested that the best of this field is over, and the youth would not have an opportunity to have similar experiences going forward.   I could feel the audience slowly withdraw support mostly because the context became more about "look at me and what I've done" rather than offering something for us to use in the future.

He did serve his company in an era which we hope will change and not be repeatable in the future, but that has nothing to do with learning systems, communities of practice, and the work that can be produced by Instructional Designers, Trainers, and Human Performance Technologists moving forward.

References

Class presentation, recording, and notes.