Lessons Learned in Building a Learning Organization

Michelle Dunn

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School Is Out!

No More Pencils,
No More Books,
No More Teachers,
Dirty Looks!

School is In!

Congratulations,
your schooling
may be over
but remember
that your education
still continues!

Various Types of Learning

- Test / QA skills
- Methodology / Processes
- Culture
- Technology / Tools
- Business / Domain Knowledge
- Soft skills
  - communication, problem solving, teamwork
- Management / Leadership

What is a Learning Culture?

- Recognizes, creates, and explores new knowledge
- Fosters knowledge to generate new ideas and concepts
- Grows from successes and failures
- Innovates fast enough to thrive in a changing environment

Motivation, Empowering, Innovation

How Can We Do it Now?

⬆ Rapid Change / Releases

⬇ Human Knowledge Base

⬇ Money / Training Budgets

⬇ Time to Learn

Benefits to the Individual

- **More Hireable**
  - More varied toolbox of skills
  - Ability to compete in market
  - Continued employment
- **More Money**
  - Show ability to learn and try new skills
  - Given new responsibility / roles
  - Gain new skills
- **New Career**
  - Exposure to new areas

Benefits to the Organization

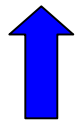*Invest in most valuable company asset … developing people*
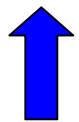
⬆ Productivity, skills, and quality of work
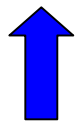
⬆ Retention, and job satisfaction
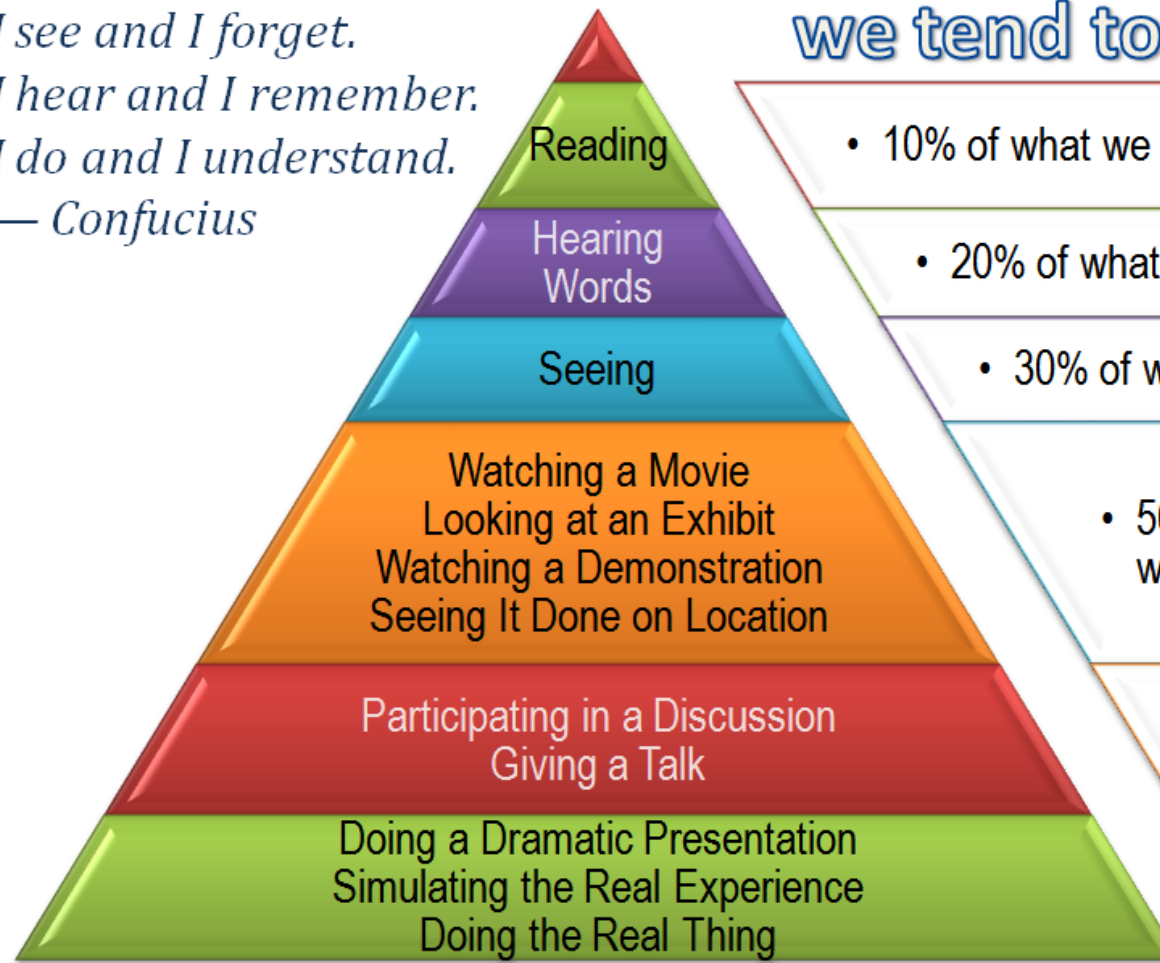
⬇ Waste, down time, and absenteeism

⬆ Adapt to workplace change

Sounds Great but … How?

- ## Start Simple
  - ### Gain Knowledge with learning that is:
    - Low cost,
    - Low effort,
    - High impact
- ## Whole Team Involvement
  - ### Employees and consultants
- ## Focus on "Training Stickyness"
  - ### Acquire knowledge and retain that knowledge through practice

Create a Library

- **Magazines**
- **Books**
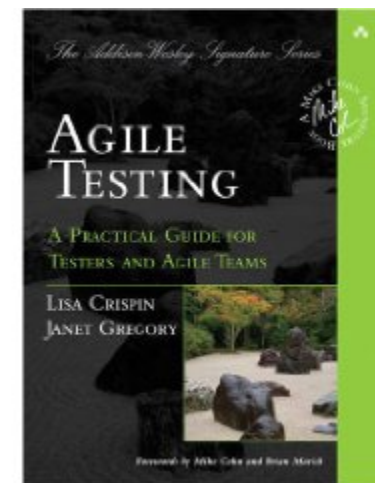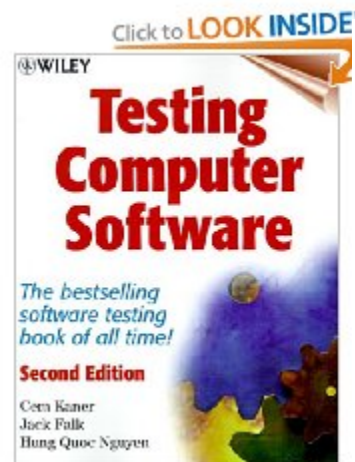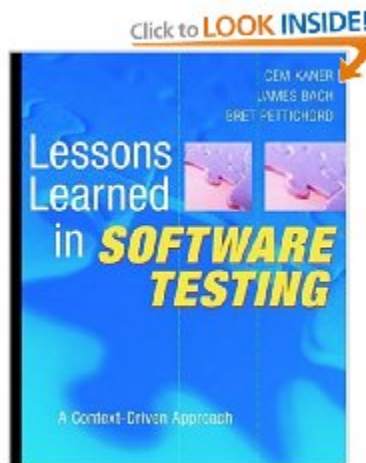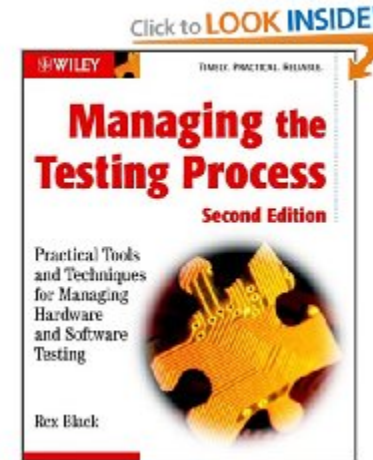
Not just paper anymore

- ## QA Professional Websites
  - Presentations
  - Articles
- ## Stickyminds
  - Powerpass
- ## Blogs
- ## AST – Association for Software Testing

Networking

- Not just for job opportunities
- Calgary based networks
  - SQDG
  - APLN
  - CAMUG
  - CIPS
- Colleagues
- LinkedIn

Skill Development

- OpenSource contributions
- Evaluation copy of test tools
- Weekend Tester
- Soft skills
  - Toastmasters
  - Coaches camp
  - Leadership training
  - Facilitation
  - Negotiation

Senior Test Resources

- **Senior consultants**
  - E.g. Highly skilled, highly experienced QA/QC experts
- **Process expert**
  - E.g. Agile coach
- **Test/QC expert**
  - E.g. Exploratory test consultant
- **QA communication expert**
  - E.g. Metrics / Release Management consultant

Courses & Workshops

- Courses
  - SAIT – QA certificate
  - Test design
  - Project management – Mount Royal
- Workshops (e.g. Thoughtworks)
- Webinars
- E-Training

Internal Presentations

- Lunch & Learns, given by the team to the team
- Topics must be varied, current and engaging
  - Skills (automation testing)
  - Product (new features)
  - Professional (resume writing)
  - Personal/Life Skills (leadership)

Road Shows & Meetings

- Quarterly executive road show
  - Vision of the quarter and coming year

- Monthly IT/QA presentations
  - Strategy on how team will contribute & align to company's vision

- Team meetings

Retrospectives

- Meeting to uncover lessons learned of a project iteration or project milestones
- Retrospectives aren't just for projects, they are also useful for
    - Process improvement
    - Vision / Goal reviews
    - Technology
    - Performance Reviews / Goal Setting
    - ETC.

Certification

"To Certify or To Not Certify … that is the question"

- Common terminology
- Expand your vision of QA and its role
- Spawn study groups
- Recertification = continued learning

Conferences

- For various skill and experience levels
- Exposure to various
  - Tools
  - Processes
  - QA experts
- Presentation style or discussion style

Mentoring

- Experienced (mentors) are matched with lesser experienced (mentees)

- Formal vs. In-Formal

- Internal vs. External

- Examples
  - Accelerate top performers
  - On-boarding of new staff
  - Executive coaching

Buddy System

- Reciprocal learning where staff is paired by sharing similar interests

- Formal vs. Informal

- Examples:
  - Leadership / technical testing
  - Junior business tester / int. tester
  - Usability / automation

Top 5 Training Roadblocks

No Money
- Seen as a cost not as an investment

No Time
- For training
- For experimenting with new ideas

Lack of Management Support
- Bottom up approach
- Dictate vs. Collaborate

Training vs. Learning Culture
- "One size fits all"
- Training just the individuals
- Only formal education is valued
- Value quantity vs. quality

Lack of innovation and motivation

Strive for a Learning Culture

- Communicate and incorporate new knowledge
- Learn from your mistakes
- Give time to learn
- Empower everyone to contribute to improving existing processes
- Review and constantly evolve

1. Communication & Incorporate

- Start Small and Grow
- Communicate and teach your learnings and new ideas
- Create norm that every person who attends training is expected to:
  - Train others
  - Propose improvements
  - Incorporate learnings into day to day activities

2. Learn from your mistakes

*"**Success is a lousy teacher.**"*
Bill Gates

- Learn from errors – both commission and omission
- Tolerate risks

3. Giving Time to Learn

- Slack Time
- Google 20% a week
- 4 hours a week
- 1 hour lunch/learn a week

4. Encourage Everyone to Contribute

- Create a culture that empowers everyone
- Everyone has an opportunity to learn/share knowledge and work together
- Collaboration - "Joint work towards a common end"
- Reward motivation and innovation

5. Review and Continually Evolve

Goal: Instill a continuous learning mentality

- Get buy-in from management and organization
- Provide continuous learning opportunities
- Acquire skills needed for future growth
- Review all aspects of the business for improvement

Summary

- Create a culture of learning
- Training and Learning are an integral part of strategic planning cycle
- Value all forms of learning
    - Formal/Informal
    - Internal/External

Questions