

In My Opinion...

Dean Says:

They Just Don't Want To Learn!



Chadwick Kicker

"So how was your day in school?" I asked my friend who teaches second grade in a south Florida public school.

"Truthfully," she said with a sigh, "it seemed like another day in a prison. These kids come to school with the worst attitudes I have ever experienced. They just do not want to learn!"

Wow, I thought to myself. Am I ever glad that I don't teach second grade. (I imagine there would be a good number of second graders and their parents who would also breathe a sigh of relief.)

My teaching experiences focus only on adults. Adults who come to seminars eager to learn whatever subject I happen to have been hired to teach on that particular day. I do have to focus my efforts to make somewhat dry material interesting enough to keep their attention. But, I generally do not have to overcome a negative attitude about learning.

Okay, once in a while, someone will attend a seminar who really doesn't want to attend. Perhaps his or her supervisor scheduled the class for him or her. Most of the time, such individuals either get caught up in the class activities and

forget to retain their initial negative attitude. Or, they simply don't return after lunch the first day. Well, actually they usually do show up on the afternoon of the last day of the seminar, only to become angry when we won't give them an attendance certificate.

So, for the most part, the people that I am privileged to teach, truly want to learn. But, what about the rest of the people in the fire alarm industry?

On a good year, I may have the opportunity to speak to five or six hundred seminar participants. Some associations report that over 14,000 companies provide some aspect of alarm system installation. Even if most of these companies only have two or three employees, that means my colleagues and I only interact with maybe 4% of all the people engaged in the alarm system field.

While we consider numbers of participants, we can add to the number of alarm company employees all of the individuals who work in other aspects of the fire alarm industry. A significant number of people work as designers associated with architects and engineering firms. Quite a number of people work for various public Authorities Having Jurisdiction. Another few thousand or so individuals work for various private Authorities Having Jurisdiction, especially insurance companies. And, these numbers do not even consider the large number of owner representatives who could benefit from a fire alarm seminar.

Naturally, certain barriers exist that may prevent some people from attending seminars. They do not have the time or financial resources necessary. But, in contrast, professional development has to play a significant role in virtually everyone's career. So they ought to focus on finding either the time or the money to attend.

Those who provide seminars offer a limited number of seminars each year. And yet, recently at least one large regional alarm association had to cancel a seminar because of lack of preregistrations. We can blame some of that on the fear of additional terrorist attacks. But I also think that the events of September 11th have also become a very convenient excuse for a lot of cutbacks that otherwise would have had to find some other reason to blame.

So if we decide that room exists in the existing seminars, and if we decide to accept the reality that the seminar providers would increase the number of seminars if the attendance rose proportionately, how do we explain the fact that we reach a relatively small number of people each year?

Maybe our seminars lack the necessary quality? The evaluations that participants provide do not seem to support that potential allegation. Most participants give very high marks to the seminars offered by organizations like the Automatic Fire Alarm Association, the Society of Fire Protection Engineers, and the National Fire Protection Association.

These high marks probably derive from the efforts those organizations have made to develop educationally sound, learning experiences, and to recruit instructors with a broad knowledge of the technical subjects and the skills to present the material in an interesting fashion.

So why have so few individuals signed up to attend a seminar that will surely give a boost to the knowledge they use every day on the job? I really don't know. Perhaps you can help me by sending me an e-mail with your thoughts.

I hope against all hope that the reason so many don't attend isn't that they just don't want to learn. □

**The Moore-Wilson
SIGNALING
REPORT**

Volume 9, No. 4

Page 14

Copyright © 2001 by Hughes Associates, Inc.