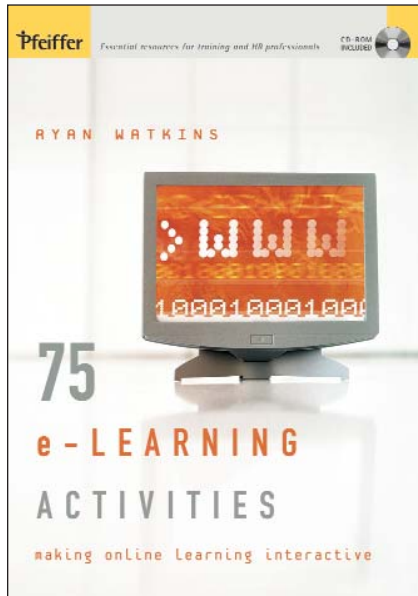


Wow! . . . Made Easy



75 E-Learning Activities: Making Online Learning Interactive

By Ryan Watkins
Reviewed by Nicole Wright Dalton



AS TRAINING PROFESSIONALS, we've all heard that online learning can be dull and that we need to find ways to increase or simply put excitement back into our instruction. So, many of us turn to online and print resources to find new ideas that will make our learners say, "Wow!"

There are plenty of books on the market that purport to help instructors, instructional designers, and course developers bring that certain spark to their online learning sessions. They generally promise readers engaging activities that will make participants fall in love with their online courses and eschew traditional classroom training for the rest of their educational experiences. More off-putting, those books often are written in a language so lofty that readers need to have their Webster's by their sides to uncover the author's pearls of wisdom.

75 E-Learning Activities: Making Online Learning Interactive by Ryan Watkins, however, is not that typical e-learning resource. It's written realistically, taking into account that not everyone is a technological guru or an experienced online learning designer. Watkins recognizes that some readers simply may be transitioning from traditional classroom instruction or supplementing theirs with online components. "For most of us," he writes, "the e-learning classroom is a new environment that requires a variety of technology skills and communications strategies that are not the same as we have used in our previous traditional classroom experiences."

Throughout the book, Watkins works hard to make readers comfortable with this potentially new arena, using language that isn't condescending, but rather thorough, sincere, and friendly. It's evident that he wants to make sure that readers realize that the move to online learning shouldn't be painful, nor should it sacrifice creativity, even when producing instructional materials under the pressure of deadlines.

A Tactical Approach

This month, *T+D* examines books about strategies in the workplace.

Leading From the Center Series

By Duke Corporate Education
(Dearborn Trade, September 2005, \$16.95 each)



These newly released short books are an interesting compression of the teachings of the Duke CE center. The books seem to be an ideal

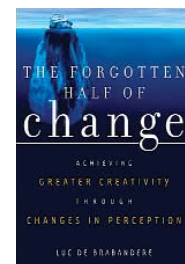
length to consume on a short airplane flight. (From an executive's current post in the sticks to a headquarters job, perhaps?)

The series of six (three of which are available next month) is impressive because it condenses powerful teachings into short, concise chapters. One has to wonder why more business books can't do the same. Even the charts and graphics have a pared-down feeling that makes them easy to grasp on first glance. The only downside? The silly, generic-hip cover images.

—Rex Davenport

The Forgotten Half of Change: Achieving Greater Creativity Through Changes in Perception

By Luc de Brabandere
(Dearborn Trade, May 2005, \$20.00)



The author summed up this book best: "The spoken word and the written word are two different things." Too bad he didn't take his own advice!

With the help of this book, designers and instructors can incorporate into their learning materials activities that will make online educational experiences exciting and engaging for both the facilitator and participants. The author assures readers who are accustomed to designing for the traditional classroom that they also can use creative activities in their online design, and they may notice that some of those activities are spin-offs of old favorites. And while his suggestions are best utilized in an online program incorporating chat rooms, discussion boards, and email, Watkins also admits that self-directed online programs may not be able to employ those activities effectively (due to the lack of interaction with instructors and other students).

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As an instructional designer, I was excited to see that Watkins discusses the need to match online learning activities to course objectives. As anyone creating instructional materials knows, objectives are the heart of effective instruction and measurement. Each component must serve a purpose and not just be used because we like the activity or need to waste 15 minutes. Thankfully, there are plenty of activities in this book that can be used as-is, or altered to meet a wide variety of objectives.

One of the most enticing aspects of the book is its organization: It's logical and well thought out, and is designed to be used in sections. The book begins with an introduction that tells readers how to get the most out of the information, providing thorough explanations of e-learning. Most important, Watkins explains how an e-learning environ-

ment can enhance the experience of everyone involved in the process: instructors, instructional designers, and participants. He provides detailed descriptions of the structures of the activities included in the book, as well as a matrix for easily selecting the most appropriate activity. His format is based on group size, mode (synchronous or asynchronous), and the time required to accomplish the exercise, and is a terrific tool for busy designers needing to quickly find an appropriate activity. In fact, the entire first section features numerous tips and information about effective e-learning that's geared not only for designers, but for instructors and participants, too.

From introductions and icebreakers in Section Two to collaboration and

team building in Section Four to increasing interactivity in Section Six, the chapters relating to specific activities are arranged in a manner that's conducive to their application in an online environment. Watkins also includes some helpful tools in the e-learning skills section that cover topics such as the differences between e-learning and traditional skills studies, expectations for e-learning, and e-learning readiness assessment. Those items make terrific prework assignments for participants embarking on their first online learning experience or for those needing a quick refresher about the requirements of online learning.

In addition, other sections of the book contain useful tools. There's a glossary of terms and an accompanying CD filled with example activities that can be loaded and utilized in online

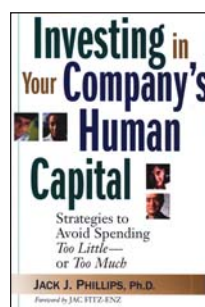
While Luc de Brabandere sounds like an amazing lecturer, his ideas got lost on paper. When a lecturer admits he walks into a room unscripted, it's commendable. But I can't give the same credit to an author of an ill prepared book. At the very least, readers need some sort of organizational example—real or hypothetical—to help guide them through his ideas about change. And judging solely by the author's quotes and preface, I was sure that I would get that. But after reading the first two chapters, I quickly realized it was going to be a long 169 pages. The author's lessons would be much more enduring if he made them clearly link to his reasons for writing the book.

No doubt, the notion of achieving creativity through perception changes is a great lesson to apply—not only in the workplace but in life. And as long as you can weed through the ramblings, you will uncover some great chunks of information about how to do that.

—Tish Few

Investing in Your Company's Human Capital: Strategies to Avoid Spending Too Little or Too Much

By Jack J. Phillips
(Amacom, May 2005, \$34.95)



According to this book, human capital “represents the relationship between what organizations invest in employees and the emerging success.” But how can companies determine the

amount of money necessary to achieve that success?

Jack Phillips, well-known ROI guru, aims to help readers solve that equation. He provides five separate strategies: let others do it, invest the minimum, invest with the rest, invest

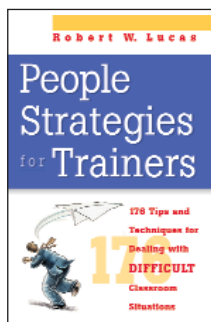
until it hurts, and invest when there is a payoff. Each is outlined thoroughly with a basic definition of the strategy, one or more case studies, advantages and disadvantages, and more. You can trust the information in this book to make important decisions, not just because of Phillips's guru status, but also because each chapter is chock-full of research and data.

—Eva Kaplan-Leiserson

**People Strategies for Trainers:
176 Tips and Techniques for Dealing
with Difficult Classroom Situations**

By Robert W. Lucas

(Amacom, June 2005, \$21.95)



Think you can handle tough situations and demanding participants without losing face or your cool? For most of us, that's easier said than done. But thanks to Robert

Lucas, the hurdles of training just got smaller.

People Strategies for Trainers is a straight-forward guide to handling issues that all educators face, including participant attitude problems, distractions, and language barriers. And the problem-solving tips and strategies that Lucas presents are easy to understand and reference.

Not only does Lucas give advice on how to deal with issues during facilitation, he also includes information about preclass preparation, seating arrangements (with diagrams), and creative strategies for group learning. The appendices are teeming with various resources for trainers and presenters to use in creating a more stimulating and effective learning experience.

—Josephine Rossi

courses. I believe that both are helpful supplements, and the latter will encourage readers to incorporate at least one or two activities into their future online learning materials.

Overall, Watkins' book, *75 E-Learning Activities: Making Online Learning Interactive*, is a real winner. Because of its engaging activity suggestions, the book is sure to help instructors, instructional designers, and course developers put the Wow!-factor into their online educational materials. It also is well suited for workplace learning professionals who are creating online environments that use collaborative technologies to contribute to their learning experiences. Consequently, I give this book three and a half cups of coffee and recommend adding it to your bookshelf as a handy

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resource for creating online materials. Remember, creativity is only limited by your imagination. So, read through the great activity suggestions, use them as-is, or make them your own. Your participants will thank you for it.

75 E-Learning Activities: Making Online Learning Interactive, by Ryan Watkins. John Wiley and Sons: San Francisco. 352 pp. \$75.00

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