

Give me high touch before high tech

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This is a draft of an article that appears in the September 2002 edition of The Training Report.

Our society has a thing about technology. A barrage of colorful store flyers convince us to buy gizmos like digital cameras; cell phones and palm pilots. We buy them but do we get much value? Digital cameras don't give the picture taking quality of old SLR cameras. Cell phones are a driving hazard. And palm pilot ♦ well have you ever been around anyone who lost all their data through a glitch? Likewise with the medical profession and e-learning, people buy into technology but where is the value? It's easier to find high tech than high touch, but high touch is where we should be going.

Is there a Doctor in the house?

Recently, I had an encounter with the medical fraternity. This story is not meant to cast dispersions on the doctors who worked with me. They were diligent about trying to find out what was wrong with me. My beef is that most of them were trusting technology to identify the source of my problem, not good, old-fashioned face-to-face diagnosis. Most were putting high tech before high touch.

I've had a nasty cough for about a year-and-a-half. Do you remember the TV ads about seeing a doctor about a persistent cough? I do, so I've been trying to stop my hacking. Getting a diagnosis sounds like a good idea to me, and to people who told me ♦ 'you'd better look after that terrible cough'. One GP, six specialists and four computer-assisted test, later I still did not know what was wrong with me. Then I spent 15 minutes with a student doctor. He asked questions, probed, looked at my situation from different angles. He was Mr. High Touch ♦ all the way. He kept notes, went over them with me to ensure that he had my whole story. He excused himself, met with the doctor, in this case an allergist.

When the student and doctor returned the doctor proceeded to explain to me what I had. ♦ But ♦ I protested, a CT scan proved that I do not have post nasal drip ♦. To which he replied. ♦ That test doesn't tell you if you have post nasal drip. You've seen too many doctors my friend and had too many tests. ♦ For me the message is clear, at least in this case, a doctor who asks questions, works with the individual patient and listens, does not need computerized technology to make a diagnosis. Technology can be marvelous, but it

has to be the right technology and it cannot replace the human element. Say hi to touch, bye to tech.

You got the magic e-learning touch

So what does this have to do with e-learning, you wonder. Simply this. We need the human touch for e-learning to succeed. Long hours spent selecting the right software to manage your e-learning site (an LMS), debating the benefits of sharable courseware objects (SCORM) or selecting authoring tools are going to be wasted time if your content does not have the human touch. What is the human touch in e-learning? It depends of the type of e-learning you are considering. The answer is different for self-paced e-learning, electronic support systems, informal learning and leader-led e-learning.

If your e-learning is of the self-paced type, where individuals study independently, often called WBT, you've got the human touch when you use people, their problems in your scenarios. Reams of hypertexted information, sometimes called information dumps or electronic page turners don't cut it. A book is better than dry hypertexted information because it is more accessible, it has an index to take you where you want to go and intuitive to navigate. Another way to include the human touch in self-paced e-learning, is to have coaches available to help students when they are having problems with a self-paced unit. Firms like SmartForce offer online coaches.

The human touch in electronic support systems is simply providing clear easy-to-understand information that is framed in the context of the work being performed. For example, an electronic support systems, or EPSS as they are sometimes called, that is helping you use software needs to include clear examples that zero in on the types of real problems people face in using the software. A good example of an EPSS with a human touch is the wizard in MS Word that helps you set the format of a new document whether it be a general document, a letters and faxes, a memo or other document. You can check this out in Word by selecting File, New. The wizard pops up.

Informal learning in an e-learning context is a good Website, a discussion group or online documents that is not a structured training intervention, but nevertheless provides pertinent information. The Purina site (<http://www.purina.com/>) that helps you select and care for a pet is a good example of an informal learning site.

In the leader-led realm of e-learning, where course are given online by instructors the human touch is an instructor who works with students to identify their personal learning needs, ensures that students are comfortable with the technology, provides pertinent feedback, facilitates group forming and discussing and generally ensures that the online course has a positive learning environment.

A new guy in town

A new type of leader-led e-learning is coming into its own. It's already here but in some ways, it's still in its infant stage. This is the ultimate high touch tool for human performance improvement. E-coaching. I predict huge potential in this field. I've worked with a couple of personal coaches and they have brought focus and direction to my life.

My coaches worked with me to establish my agenda, where I wanted to go with my life, and they asked me questions to help me focus on my chosen path. They used techniques to help me get out of my head and into my body. They helped me deal with love-relationships, professional projects and generally how I showed up in the world. Just think, a personal champion to help you sort through what really bugs you.

I'd like to share with you more information about e-coaching. First, what is this animal? E-coaching is conducted one-on-one or in a group. Let's concentrate on personal, or individualized e-coaching. Individualized e-coaching creates an intimate, confidential relationship between a coach and a client with the purpose of helping the client stand tall and focus on what they want out of life whether it be in a personal or professional sense. Sometimes coaches and clients decide to concentrate on to do lists, other times they focus on ♦to be lists♦. That's when you get the full impact of coaching. If you can change how you show up in the world, how you ♦be♦, the to do's look after themselves.

Why does coaching work? According to the International Coach Federation, the leading professional body for the coaching profession, coaching works for the following reasons:

1. The synergy developed between the coach and client creates momentum.
2. Better goals are set. These refined goals naturally pull the client towards the goal post, rather than requiring the client to push themselves to the finish line.
3. The client develops new skills, and these skills translate into more success.

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### The Coaches Training Institute

There are several organizations offering coaching training. (See below.) One, CTI, teach Co-Active Coaching. This approach results in a dynamic alliance between coach and client. They work together as equals in meeting the needs of the client. CTI holds that all people are naturally creative, resourceful, and whole. As well they are completely capable of finding their own answers to whatever challenges they face. Can you imagine the impact of working with someone who thinks you have the answers. (This reminds me of my high school History teacher, Miss Stuart. She would often say that I had the answer to a history question. She had confidence in me. After a while I believed her and I worked hard to ensure I had the answers. I even carried this into university and my first job, where I studied and taught history.) In Co-Active Coaching the client has the answers and it is the job of the Co-Active Coach to listen and empower rather than inform and advise. e-Coaching is the definitive learner-centre approach to doing better work and having a better life. And it works. Speaking to someone who has experienced coaching is like talking to someone who has experienced a religious conversion. Honestly, I've never spoken to anyone who has had a religious conversion, but I have spoken to people being coached ♦and wow are they enthusiastic.

## The future

At present, E-coaching is delivered over the telephone, email and online discussion groups. Most e-coaching occurs in sessions of 30 to 45 minutes, three to four times a month. I predict that in the next two years there will be expanding use of e-coaching over the Web using real-time video and voice tools. In five years time this will be used extensively. I can see it being delivered in shorter sessions, as needed, using the Web. What is important this will be the use of technology to increase high touch, not to undermine high touch, as technology often does. E-coaching may be the ultimate 'killer app' for the Web that e-learning was supposed to be. Can you imagine receiving regular, targeted feedback and championing on your personal or business life. Now that's high touch!!

Sources on the Web to learn more about e-coaching

Coach U

<http://www.coachu.com/>

e-coaching portal

<http://www.e-coaching.org/new/>

International Coach Federation

<http://www.coachfederation.org/>

The Coaches Training Institut

<http://www.thecoaches.com/>

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