

N A S A G A

North American Simulation and Gaming Association

SIMAGES

Volume 2, Issue 2 - Fall 1999

The NASAGA Organization would like to thank Gail Heidenhain and Randy Hollandsworth for their time and effort in creating this issue of SIMAGES.

Inside this Issue:

- Fail Fast and Succeed Quickly - Marla Allen
 - Cool Stuff !!
 - Accelerated Learning: Games and More - Gail Heidenhain
 - Letter from Board Chair - Kevin Eikenberry
-

Fail Fast and Succeed Quickly "Is time and experience the same?"

by Marla Allen

A few years ago I joined the optical industry. This high tech industry is by far the most humbling learning curve I have ever experienced. Needless to say I was used to being the expert, the person everyone ran to for answers, suddenly, overnight, I was the person running around trying to get my questions answered by others.

It was my mission to become respected in the optical industry by developing the greatest training programs that anyone had ever seen in the optical industry. I believed that I could gain respect and training knowledge by working in the stores to understand the technical side of the business. I wanted to "feel the same pain" that the opticians felt daily. In an optical retail store there is a dispensing counter, the place where glasses are fitted to the customer's face. Fitted is a nice way of saying bent, aligned, adjusted etc. I was terrified at the prospect of having to fit glasses. Why? Quite simply, the extent of my ability to work with my hands stops at changing light bulbs or driving a car and I am not exaggerating. Also, in fitting glasses, adjustments are exactly opposite of what the eyes tell you to do! If it looks like the adjustment should be done on the left, the adjustment will actually take place on the right. So what did I do? I spent the first few weeks on the job avoiding the dispensing counter, convinced that I would break the first frame I attempted to adjust.

Finally I decided that it was time to confront my greatest fear and spend some time at the dispensing counter. This was the only way to move toward respect in the field. A man walked in the front door and headed straight toward me. I took a deep breath and said, "What can I do for you today?" I was hoping he simply wanted his glasses cleaned, but no such luck. "I need to have these glasses adjusted, they're a bit tight on my head." I took the glasses and glanced around, hoping an optician would save me, but there was not a single one in sight. So I said, "Sure".

I held the temple in the salt pan for a few seconds to warm it up, to make it easier to bend, then took it in my hands and gently began to apply some pressure and SNAP! Self-fulfilling prophecy was alive and well! The temple of the glasses broke off in my hand. The customer asked, "What does this mean?" Well, it meant that he was going to get a new pair of glasses, but it also meant that my greatest fear of adjusting glasses had now moved up to complete horror! For the next three weeks I spent my time selling, cleaning counters, stocking shelves,

taking out the garbage, anything and everything but dispensing. Finally, the Senior Vice President of Operations (my direct report), a man by the name of Jim, called me in the office to talk about the progress of my training. He said he was very pleased with my sales ability, but he wasn't sure about how much progress I was making at learning to dispense. I told him about my first (and only) experience in dispensing so far. He nodded and replied with a smile, "I heard". I expected him to give me the standard "everyone breaks a frame now and then speech", but he surprised me. He said, "Back in the laboratory there is a box of hundreds of frames waiting to be shipped back to the manufacturer. Why don't you take some time and play with them. You'll find that most frames don't break as easily as you think. And he added, "don't worry if you break them all."

Well, that's exactly what I did. For the rest of the day I bent and twisted and mangled every one of those frames, making visual and written notes of what they were made of, the exact type of metal or plastic and exactly how hard it was to break each of them. I was shocked to find out that some of them were virtually indestructible. I couldn't break them no matter what I did?

The next day I walked in and went straight to the dispensing counter, started adjusting glasses and never looked back. As a matter of fact, in the three years I worked in the optical industry I never broke another frame, which is better than average. "Even the best opticians break one or two frames a year!" I was told.

Which brings me to the point of this story. If the average optician breaks several frames a year, then what Jim allowed me to do was to gain years of experience in a single afternoon! And this is a very critical lesson. Experience is not gained through the passage of time; it's gained through participation in activity.

Time and experience are not one in the same. The dictionary defines experience as "something done, seen or taken part in; personal participation in an activity leading to knowledge. Notice what word isn't mentioned at all: time. Also, notice what words are mentioned, participation and activity.

What I experienced in the lab that day was learning acceleration or learning compression. I compressed or pressed together years and years of breaking eyeglass frames into a single afternoon by pulling the time out of the process. I am convinced that had Jim not given me the opportunity to accelerate my learning by letting me play with the eyeglass frames, it might have been many months or even years for me to gain the experience I got in a single afternoon.

The question for you is: What can I do in the training environment to accelerate learning and ultimately the performance of people? Consider allowing trainees to fail as fast as they can so they can succeed quickly! Discover this concept and you are on your way to amazing results!

Cool Stuff !!

More Puzzles from the Thiagi Game Letter.....

Here's a collection of word puzzles. Use them to:

- Engage the early birds at the beginning of your session.
- Reward the participants who return on time from their breaks.
- Energize a blasé audience with an intellectual challenge.

Here's another use for puzzles like this:

Incorporate them into an activity that demonstrates that a team is superior to any of its individual members.

Distribute the puzzles and ask the participants to solve them independently. Ask them not to help one another.

After 3 minutes, ask everyone to stop and have each participant count the number of puzzles that he or she has solved.

Go through the puzzle sheet, one item at a time, and ask the participants to shout out the answer. Usually, one or more participants give the solution to each item. If there is a tough item that nobody has solved, skip it.

Count the total number of items solved by the group as a whole and ask if any individual has independently solved that many items. The participants easily figure out the learning point:

The team is more competent than any of its individual members.



Answers:

1. more often than not
2. condensed dictionary
3. look on the bright side
4. backward glance
5. no u-turn
6. world without end
7. listed in alphabetical order
8. quit following me

This revised excerpt is from the Thiagi Gameletter,
 Copyright 1998 by Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer, San Francisco, CA

Message from the Board Chair

I got an email yesterday from one of the editors of SIMAGES asking me for an article for this issue. I pondered for a while what I might write, after all I knew there would be information about the conference, and the last thing you want to read is one more "You need to be at the Conference" (though you really do!). So after struggling about what to write, I decided to reflect on my six years in NASAGA, and where we are as a group now from where we were then.

Six years ago this month I went to my first NASAGA Conference, in Bloomington, Indiana. There were 80-90 people there and I loved it! I left knowing I would be at many future Conferences (for one reason because I had been elected to the Board!) Now as my second and final Board term ends it makes some sense to look back.

NASAGA is bigger than we were six years ago, but still very small. Over the past few years I have heard conversations that we wouldn't want the group to get too big - as the makeup and complexion of our Conference would change (apparently not for the better). I never bought that perspective. I believe the magic (yes I think that is the right word) of NASAGA Conferences could be maintained and would even grow even if our Conferences doubled, or tripled in size. I urge us as an organization over the next few years to see if I am right.

Six years ago NASAGA was mostly a Conference held once a year. There wasn't much else. Yes we got the journal and every year or so (usually soon after a conference when people had energy to do it) we had a SIMAGES. SIMAGES then were very sporadic and didn't have the kind of "meat" that you will find in these pages. Now we have a list serve, a website, all sorts of ad hoc email conversations going on between members, and regional meetings happening in at least two cities, with other areas thinking of doing the same thing.

I could go on, but I think you see the pattern. NASAGA isn't what it was six years ago, and I believe it is better. I believe we are just taking a peek at what we can become. I believe we can maintain all of the magic of the past as we share (which is both our privilege and duty to do) with others in our professions what a powerful set of tools we have in games and simulations.

I challenge us as a community of practitioners, as members of this organization and as friends, to share what we've got. We've got something wonderful. I also thank you for the opportunity to have had some part in the growth we've made in the last six years. Now it's time for others to chart our course.

Yours in Learning,

Kevin