INTRODUCTION

The BIG Picture Overview

Our model for designing and delivering Accelerated Training is as refreshing and recreational as going on holiday. In fact, going on holiday is a great metaphor for describing the M.E.S.S.A.G.E.™ model of Accelerated Training.

Learning is both easy and enjoyable. Ask anyone who has been consumed with a passion for their hobby. Memory recall is also easy. Ask anyone to recall the name of someone they are attracted to. In both cases, our attention is heightened and our motivation cranked up a gear because there is a key benefit for us from investing the energy it takes to assimilate and memorize new information. That learning and memorizing are both easy and enjoyable are core beliefs that drive our approach to learning, training and development. It is only our own self-imposed hang-ups and the undeveloped teaching styles we have encountered that have led us to believe otherwise.

Georgi Lozanov may legitimately be regarded as the founder of Accelerated Learning. He uses an approach called ‘Suggestopaedia’ which is largely focused on helping each learner remove their own self-imposed barriers to learning. Only in this way can they release their reserve potential.
So, let us go on holiday. The model is a framework for a perfect holiday. M.E.S.S.A.G.E.™ is a mnemonic standing for Mindset (and mindsetting), Entrance, Switch Ownership, Store, Act, Go-Again, and Engage.

A perfect holiday begins well in advance. Months beforehand you gather a wide selection of brochures advertizing various destinations (or ‘outcomes’ in training terms). From these promotional materials you can get a picture of what might be different in your life depending on your choice of resort. This heightens the awareness of the tension between where you are now (for example, a cold, wet, foggy, dark Wednesday afternoon in central London) and where you could be if you commit to action (for example, a coral-white sandy beach by the Barrier Reef in Australia). If you are surfing the web for your desired destination, there may even be sound, video clips and perhaps a competition to entice you.

When was the last time you were invited to a workshop in such an enticing way? This is what the Mindset phase is all about – helping learners set realistically expanded expectations well in advance of the training and development event. We need to think holiday! We can send a brochure, a video, a CD-ROM, an invitation to our website – complete with competition! In our communication we can paint a sensory rich description of how each participant’s life will be different as a result of this experience. We can create such a hunger that if we have to tell them we are fully booked, they will be screaming for a set of alternative dates.

Something that can really help a holiday get off to a magical start is to have a wonderful journey. How many times have you been on holiday or been to a workshop where you have had a dream journey – arriving early and refreshed? Probably not many. A key question for us as hosts to ask is, ‘How can we help make the journey as smooth and pleasant as possible?’ Good maps and parking instructions are clearly important, but, we can also
begin to connect with the learners in advance by sending them a special tape or CD just for the journey – something we have kept in reserve for those last few hours before they arrive at our resort destination. Let us use some more imagination. I remember when the first training videos came out, so many ‘talking heads’. Many audio programmes still suffer from ‘talking head syndrome’ – or perhaps ‘sin-drone’ – because it is a sin to make such boring broadcasts. The BBC would not get away with it so let us borrow their best practice. By way of strong contrast, I also remember the first ‘Video Arts’ productions with John Cleese. They were entertaining as well as training – an approach that we shall call ‘Entertrainment’. This is what we aspire to in our own programmes – advanced communications packages that entertain and inform so that each participant has a magnificent Mindset before entering the venue. There will be little need for ice breakers with such a warm-up.

When designing communications, think about producing a recording that is more like a radio show or a TV documentary. If the budget precludes a lavish production, then use that imagination (let us also remember that this approach is as much about getting YOU excited, interested and motivated as the delegates).

Imagine that you have now arrived at your holiday/training destination. This is what we will be calling ‘Entrance’ – the opener, the beginning of the ‘live’ experience. Here, our clients will want to check out that the resort is as good as the promotional materials and build up. They will move into a comparative phase, and will be looking for strong guidance and leadership from us as to the where, what, who, how and when of the promised recreational activities. This is where their senses are heightened because they want to experience everything and get their money’s worth. They look here, there and everywhere to get the feel of the place and the pace. If we as hosts then provide a sensory rich experience with clear maps of what is where, and where we will be going, the
guests will soon feel at home. This will mean they will soon begin to relax and enjoy this time away from the office. It’s a treat.

Thinking of some of the activities you might do on holiday, I am sure you will understand what happens next. This is a package deal. The guests do not just turn up and go their own way. Some will need an introduction to new concepts: this is how you windsurf, this is how you dive safely, this is how you snorkel, this is how you abseil. A good instructor will help the new ‘recruits’ get to know their equipment and new skills in the minimum possible time. This is new knowledge.

All of the above can be outlined in the brochure, yet what happens next is the most significant part of a perfect holiday. As holiday-makers, your experience switches from a resort-directed experience to your own choices. Having grasped the basic skills and safety procedures, you are ready to go solo.

You choose the activities you want to spend your time on. In an instant the experience moves out of the brochure and into your own personal memories. This is the phase of the model that we call ‘Switching OwNership’ – where learners both ‘Switch On’ to the possibilities and ‘Switch Ownership’ in that they are ‘owning’ the process and making their own choices. In the training model, this is where the trainer becomes the facilitator and helps learners apply their own unique blends of intelligences to the learning they have been exposed to. This allows the learners to personalize or ‘own’ the learning.

The next phase of the model is ‘Store’. On your holiday you will have all manner of ways to store your experiences for later recall. Firstly, there is the positive emotional experience that goes straight into long-term memory. Secondly, you are likely to send postcards back to your friends describing your experience. What a brilliant idea for a training workshop: getting our ‘holiday-makers’ to send a postcard to themselves or their colleagues.
describing their learning experiences – ‘Wish you were here’. Furthermore, we have all the technical aids: cameras and video recorders. Some people even phone home, with so many delegates insisting on picking up their mobile phones during the breaks in learning, we could proactively ask them to phone someone to tell them what they are learning.

Curt Lewin has suggested that telling someone about your experiences can improve your chances of acting on your experience tenfold. In the training model we may even use digital photos to help remember the contributions the group made to make the learning a unique experience. Tony Buzan’s Mind Mapping is a wonderful memory ‘postcard’ too. Above all, it is important to tell someone else the key summary of what you have experienced so that you benefit from the truism: ‘expression deepens impression’, or put another way, ‘what you pay attention to e-x-p-a-n-d-s’.

The next phase in your perfect holiday experience is called ‘Act’. This is where you demonstrate to yourself what you have experienced. In the holiday metaphor it may be similar to ‘Store’ in you telling someone else about your adventures or showing off your new skill or tan! However, the emphasis is on ‘giving out’ at this stage – whereas ‘Store’ is about ‘taking in’ with a view to making a keepsake.

You may have a few friends round to show them your holiday snaps or videos. This flows naturally into the ‘Go-Again’ phase where you literally ‘Go-Again’ over your experiences, reviewing them (often literally re-viewing). This sends a clear message to your nervous system that this experience was significant and that it should become a strong reference point for judging the quality of other experiences. This may also mean that you are ‘still on holiday’ when you get back to work. Well, surely this is what we want from a training intervention? We want the new techniques, attitudes, skills and knowledge to be foremost in the learners’ minds when they go back
to work. In this way we can guarantee greater value from the investment in training because there will be a higher degree of skill transfer. Often when colleagues come back from a great holiday, they bring a little bit of that holiday with them. They may be bronzed on the outside and also sunny within, radiating that inner calm that true recreation stirs up within us.

In the training model, ‘Act’ is usually a ‘game show’ style activity to help learners realize how smart they are with their new discoveries. ‘Go-Again’ then becomes a wonderful review experience where learners relax deeply (like being in a hammock on a tropical hideaway location) while the holiday tour guide takes them once again through the joys they have experienced. If this does not sound like the normal kind of training workshop you attend, then may I invite you to experience one? I have found it to be transformational.

The final phase of our model, and of the perfect holiday cycle, is called ‘Engage’. This is where we build ‘memories of the future’ and make decisions – ‘Was that good for me? Do I want to go there again, or shall I plan to go somewhere else in future?’ A fantastic training experience helps the learners visualize clearly the ‘where next?’ and ‘what next?’

We build for tomorrow by celebrating the magic of today. This is far more than ‘action planning’. It is more a case of building deliberate future scenarios; how can we utilize our experiences of the holiday/learning and where can we see ourselves going with them next in order to enrich our experiences one step further? It ‘engages’ our motivation, our commitment and our desire, and keeps the vision in-sight, in-mind. It is a promise to the future.

This, in essence, is Accelerated Learning. The result is that we learn faster in a more pleasant way. This allows the learning to last longer as an enduring, pleasant and practical memory. Furthermore, the learning discoveries go deeper,
becoming a part of us that we wish to grow and develop. This is the joy of learning.

*Figure 1 is an overview Mind Map of the whole model. Have a quick look at it now, and then please take at least a 4 minute break before moving on to the next section.*

**Summary**

Accelerated Learning and Training works so powerfully because it taps into the same motivations that make learning a hobby or going on holiday such a pleasure. It has all the elements of an excellent holiday: great expectations beforehand, the buzz of the arrival at the holiday destination, the thrill of discovery, the liberty of doing your own thing, the feel-good factor of collecting mementos, the joy of sharing your experiences with others, the pleasure of reviewing what a great time you had, and dreaming about future opportunities. Since the M.E.S.S.A.G.E.™ design framework is based on what we naturally enjoy, it is naturally successful.