Busted: Ten Conference Adult Learning Myths

In conference and meeting environments, attendees receive more messages and content from attending six to eight hours of presentations than a typical day of being bombarded by advertising, direct mail, radio and TV. Duplicate that day two or three times, and you have a mind that is flooded with messages and information on excessive conference overload.

But how many of those messages are remembered? How many are actually learned and retained?

Here are ten conference adult learning myths – busted.

Myth 1: In order to learn, some portion of the attendee’s anatomy must be in contact with a chair at all times.
Fact: Attendee’s ability to learn diminishes in direct proportion to the amount of time they spend sitting.

Myth 2: The attendee that does the most listening does the most learning.
Fact: The person doing the most talking—or moving, writing—is doing the most learning.

Myth 3: The best way to teach and present is to be the “sage on stage” and give information in a well-planned lecture.
Fact: If conference presenters want someone to “hear” something, they lecture. If conference presenters want someone to “learn it,” they should be the “guide on the side” and involve attendees in discussion and activity.
Myth 4: If conference attendees would only listen, they would remember more.
Fact: Vision trumps listening in learning. Repeating the information out loud increases the chances of retention. In order to learn anything well, attendees need to talk about it with each other and “do” it a number of times.

Myth 5: The more serious the conference topic is, the more the attendee will remember.
Fact: Attendees learn—and remember—the best when there is an emotional connection. Storytelling and laughter help make conference sessions memorable.

Myth 6: Fun is only marginal to learning during a conference.
Fact: Not only do conference attendees learn best and remember more when they are having fun, they will also be more willing to seek other challenging learning experiences when fun and humor is involved.

Myth 7: The only person who should be a presenter or “sage on stage” is the expert in the field.
Fact: The gap between the presenter and attendee has shrunk. Often the attendees know more than the presenters. And, not all experts make good presenters. Actually, most experts have poor facilitation skills and make lousy presenters.

Myth 8: The more times an attendee hears an exhibitor or sponsor’s message broadcast at a conference, the more likely they’ll remember it and buy from that vendor.
Fact: A Harvard study stays that people can only remember 8-12 messages a day. The messages attendees remember are emotional, enthusiastic and entertaining, interesting and relevant. You’ll get further by being humble and authentic, than showing off that video marketing is so proud of.

Myth 9: The focus during conference sessions should be on how people present and teach.
Fact: The focus should be on the attendee, how they learn, how they retain information and sessions should be designed with the attendee’s learning in mind, not the speaker’s presentation.

Myth 10: There is only one best way to teach (lecturing) or learn (listening) in all conferences and meetings.
Fact: Every adult has a different way they prefer to learn. Lecturing and listening have the least amount of ROI of all the different learning strategies.