

## In the Market for Learning

Blog  
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When the days are longer and sunnier (I hope they still are when you're reading this), I find myself spending more time looking out the window than at my computer screen.

There — I admit it! And I think many would agree with me. Whether you are counting down to your time off or re-living your vacation memories, the summer can make it difficult to 'focus' on the work in front of you.

I wonder though, are we really not 'focused' when we shift our attention away from our usual work tasks? Do we find comfort in observing daily routines, or derive excitement from occurrences that disturb them? And, most importantly, can we learn something from our observations?

Recently, I returned from my own vacation - visiting family in Europe. The memories and experiences are still very fresh in my mind! One of the things I most looked forward to was shopping at the local markets. I longed for the friendly, community feel, personal touch and interaction this experience provides. I had already pictured the older ladies selling home-grown produce; local farmers with an abundance of fruits, vegetables, meats and cheeses; a noticeable absence of packaged goods and a kaleidoscopic array of clothing, antiques and food. The actual experience included all of the above - within a mix of new pre-packaged goods, supermarket-like rows, brand-name clothing and vendors from all over the world.

Suffice to say that I was surprised to see such change in a small-town market that otherwise has not changed since my childhood. The vendors still convey a personal approach when dealing with everyone there. It seems strange to refer to the shoppers as customers — since even strangers treat one another like friends. People take time to listen to each other, and seem genuinely interested in personal details. At the cheese stand, a grandmother complained of a bad knee and the vendor quickly suggested an herbal remedy she had created for her mother. The two had never met, yet were soon engaged in an intimate conversation about the health of their respective families. It was refreshing to witness this level of personal interest in a public space.

I came home from my vacation thinking about change, and the ways organizations manage change both internally and externally. The market has adapted to societal change and people's desires by offering more services and choices. At the same time, it remains the social hub for its community - facilitating conversation and learning, whether about which food is in season, how to prepare a certain dish, or what summer activities to engage their children in.

Looking through this lens (like looking through my window), I gained a new understanding of the importance and complexity of adapting to change while remaining true to your mission. I was also reminded how easy it is to learn something valuable to your organization, customers, and service providers - even, or maybe especially, when you are not 'focused' on learning.

So, in these lazy, hazy days of summer... look out that window. You may just find refreshing novelty in your everyday view! And if you do, we'd love for you to share your new perspective with us!