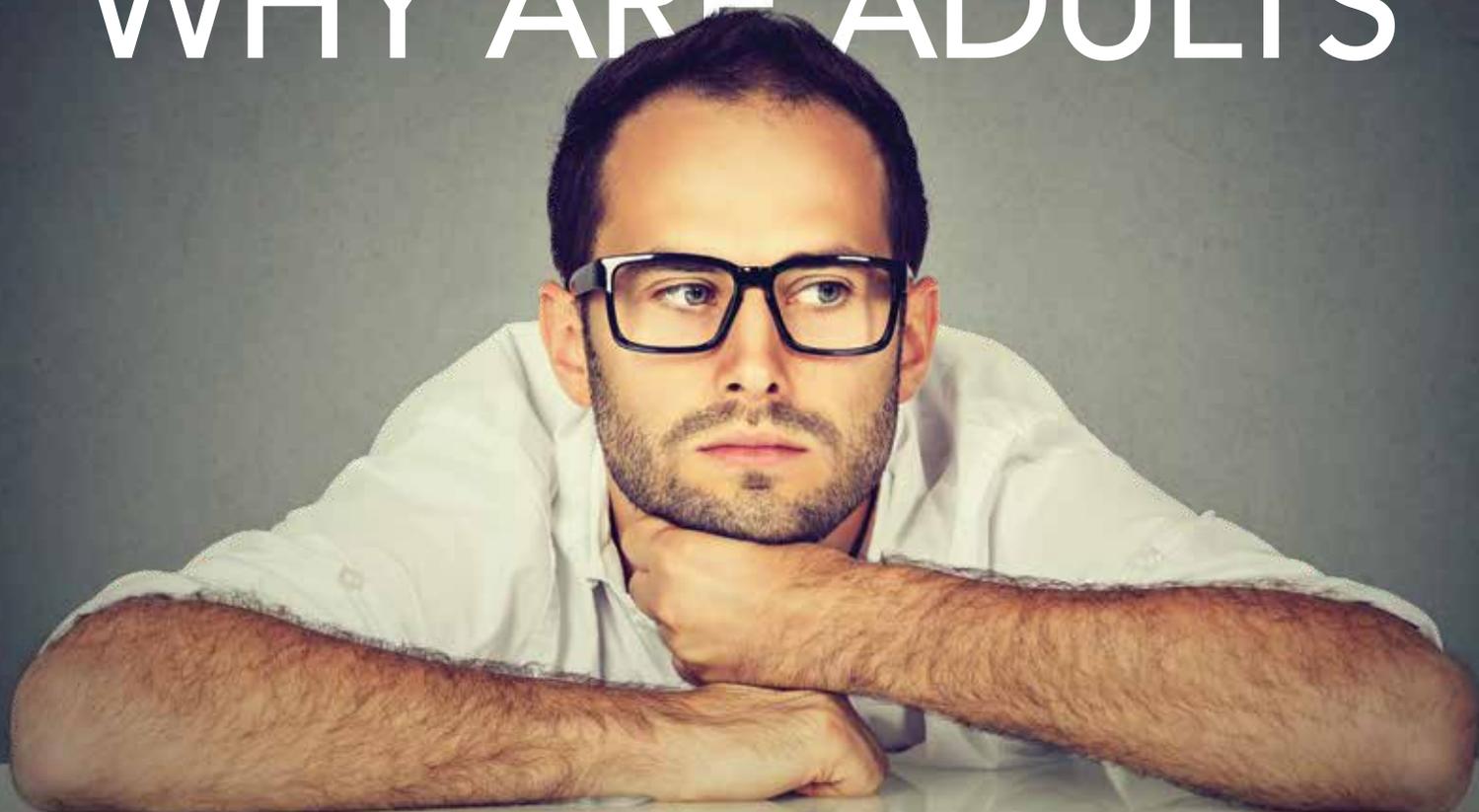


# WHY ARE ADULTS



# THE WORST LEARNERS?

**Scott Seaman**

AWSP

PRINCIPAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

*Creating a Culture, Improving Instruction*

**W**e've all been there. We've all sat in professional learning settings where the audience is completely disengaged, clearing emails and/or surfing the web. In fact, we've all developed coping and exit strategies for painful adult learning settings.

And, you can't tell me you haven't faked an important phone call and walked out of some sort of profession learning setting.

Here's the big question: Why is that? How can educators in charge of inspiring the minds of our kids not put the same energy into inspiring each other? Why is it that adults are

the worst learners? Is it the fault of the presenter or the learner? How have we created this mindset over time that adult learning has to be teacher torture, painful sit-n-get, and death by PowerPoint?

“And, you can't tell me you haven't faked an important phone call and walked out of some sort of profession learning setting.”

Enough is enough. It's time to revolutionize adult learning. It's time to bring new energy, mindset and research-based strategies to

adult learning settings. And, this is crazy talk now, but, it's time to put the same energy we expect teachers to put into their classes into the professional learning that principals provide for teachers, principals provide for each other, and central office leaders provide for principals. We need to put greater emphasis into planning and leading powerful adult learning for each other if we ever expect to impact student learning.

## TIME TO ENGAGE

So, where do you start? Begin with reflection. Who were some of your favorite teachers you had as a student? Who are some of your favorite teachers you observe now? What presenters have you

seen recently that keep an entire room engaged? What is it about these teachers that makes them so effective? High energy, enthusiasm, creativity, sense of humor, high expectations, unconditional love, quick transitions, and most importantly, less of you and more of them. These great leaders of adult learning tend to follow the simple 70-30 Rule of presenting. The audience is engaging with each other 70 percent of the time and only listening to the presenter 30 percent of the time.

You've got to be willing to let go. You provide the vision, structure, purpose, space, food and fun, then let them lead their own learning with each other. Let them wrestle with relevant problems of practice related to their contexts. Provide the gift of time to tackle these problems of practice with each other by developing and testing theories of action in a safe environment. Adults need time to engage with each other. They don't need time to sit and listen to someone reading words off the screen.

“ You've got to be willing to let go. You provide the vision, structure, purpose, space, food and fun, then let them lead their own learning with each other.”

## AWSP THEORY OF ADULT LEARNING

Thanks to the insight and feedback from principals who serve on the AWSP Professional Learning Committee, we have developed the AWSP Theory of Adult Learning. These principles are now used exclusively in all of our workshops, conferences and seminars and serve as our expectations of all adults

(presenters and participants) who appear in our adult learning settings.

### Learning happens when adults:

- Access expertise inside and outside of the group
- Participate in authentic activities with the group
- Practice with relevant Problems of Practice
- Engage (formally and informally) with colleagues
- Apply new learning to professional contexts
- Reflect on leadership and new learnings

We recommend that you adopt this Theory of Adult Learning for your own building. Set the tone for what adult learning will look and feel like in your school or district. Call out the fact that adults tend to be the worst learners and change that

mindset by changing how you lead learning yourself. Start by asking your audience of learners what they think the AWSP Theory of Adult Learning means for them as a learner and for you as the leader.

Finally, no one ever said that adult learning has to be boring and void of fun. We are no different than the kids we serve. We deserve to laugh and smile while we learn. We deserve games, music, celebrations, prizes and raffle drawings. Our work is important and crucial to the future success of all kids and it's your job to lead the professional learning for you and those around you.

How will you be remembered as an instructional leader? How will your learners describe the professional learning you lead? Will they sit up front or take a seat in the back corner by the door? ■

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