

LMI.....A Training Program As Game Changer

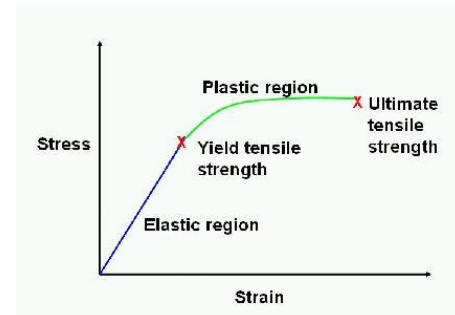
by Dr. Allen Raffetto



The usual response is "Well, our program is different!" followed by lists or spreadsheets of features, advantages and benefits that are supposed to answer the question. But they never answer the question! Just because "stuff" is different, even better, does not guarantee that people will magically change into stronger, more effective leaders. Then again, maybe I'm a different trainer with the slight edge of considerable knowledge, skill and 45 years of experience as trainer and coach in leadership. While a broad background may be an advantage, it is not sufficient to succeed at the task. So what does it take for someone to be a game-changer?

To organize my thinking I borrowed a graph (right) that came from the domain of physics and engineering, unlikely places for a clear view of leadership training. The graph shows an object's "tensile strength curve. Now instead of solid steel, think of that physical object as your brain being put under stress. Here's what happens to it.

Put the physical object under stress and it will strain to resist or cope with the stress. The graph shows what happens as more stress is added and removed. When the stress level is mild to modest, the strain on the object is minimal or manageable, and, like a rubber band, when the stress is removed, the object snaps back to its original shape. That's called the "elastic region" of the curve (in blue). In contrast when the stress forces are taken to a higher level, the strain on the object becomes large enough to change the object. That change starts to happen in what is labeled the "plastic region" (in green) because when the stress is removed, the object stays forever changed!



As it is in physics so too is it in a brain undergoing leadership training. Here's how I see it. Stress (Y axis) represents the training and development that we trainers thoughtfully take participants through. Strain (X axis) is what participants' brains are expected to do when they accept and assimilate our "stress". I believe the tensile strength curve also models what happens behaviorally and psychologically within every participant.

Typical training puts very modest "stress" on participants' brains and they "strain" their brains very little to deal with the training. When the program's stress is over, the participants snap back to their original mental and behavioral states. This is when training is just like an entertaining event to feel good about, forget about and do nothing with.

That's the "elastic outcome" that is so frustrating because nothing ever changes in outward behavior. However inside the person there is cumulative fatigue that gets stronger with subsequent events' modest stress levels. Eventually participants reach the point where they believe "none of this training is worth my effort because the results never change."

In contrast well-designed programs bring together more engaging and applicable challenges that create the higher stress of a more intensive course. When this stronger positive stress is done properly, participants challenge themselves to a higher level of "mental strain". In so doing they reach the "plastic region" of the curve where their thoughts, attitudes and beliefs start to change permanently. In my programs that's called changing "habits of attitude." In short, game-changer programs effectively stress and challenge participants to where they engage and strain their brains to achieve permanent levels of change in how they think, feel and act!

In my professional years as coach, trainer, even professor, I found or built great materials that had change-making potential but didn't have the power of positive, internal stress to reliably change the individuals' game. But I learned and in so doing changed myself. Now I know what good stress is and how to use it to strain the brain and be an effective game changer.

To quote my coach: Effective leadership training: "It ain't for sissies!"