WIRED TO GROW 2.0

Harness the Power of Brain Science to Learn and Master Any Skill

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Britt Andreatta, PhD

Author of *The Neuroscience of Learning*, *Wired to Resist*, *Wired to Connect*, and *Leading with Emotional Intelligence*

Discover the science-based secrets for fulfilling your potential by unlocking the power of your brain.

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We are biologically wired to learn: whether we're simply trying to survive or reaching to fulfill our potential. ***Wired to Grow*** contains the keys to leveraging our natural neurological wiring to help unlock the fullest expression of who we are—to become or develop into something more. This fully revised and expanded second edition, now packed with more than double the original information, draws from the most recent neuroscience research and includes two new sections on creating a growth culture of learning and delivering learning to others. This powerful guide positively transforms lives, habits, and organizations.

Dr. Britt Andreatta is an internationally recognized thought leader who creates brain science-based solutions for today's challenges. She draws on her unique background in leadership, neuroscience, psychology, and education to unlock the best in people and organizations. She has over 25 years of experience consulting with executives from all types of organizations. Learn more at: www.BrittAndreatta.com.

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Second Edition
Revised and Expanded

Britt Andreatta, PhD

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37. Asking the Right Questions

To gather the information you need to create great learning, you must ask the *right* questions.

Maybe this has happened to you: Someone calls with a training request and they are really clear on what they need. You, of course, rise to the occasion and do a great job of delivering the training they asked for. But it ultimately doesn't solve their problem. This is likely because the real problem was more complex. As learning professionals, we need to stop playing the role of "service provider" and work more like consultants; partnering with leaders to help identify and address the root causes, thus driving the long-term health and success of an organization.

In my experience, great learning professionals do a few things that can make them very effective. First, they establish a two-way relationship. They make it clear that the partnership is vital and that both they and the group they are helping have invaluable insight and information that will shape the success of the outcome. Second, good consultants ask lots of questions to learn everything they can about the challenges that need to be addressed. They identify not only the current state, but focus on what the ideal state looks like. This includes getting clear on measurable metrics as well as specific words and actions that employees should do. Finally, great consultants design and deliver a solution that creates the needed results. This requires using agile design principles, which includes piloting first drafts, seeking critical feedback from both partners and participants, and iterating until the data shows that the results are achieved.

So, let's apply this to a real situation. Most requests for training start with some kind of problem. Perhaps there has been a rise in attrition of top talent or a dip in product quality, or a key metric has gone up or down and someone decides that it can be fixed with training. The call is likely to come from either a leader in that department or perhaps someone in Human Resources who works directly with that team. If you have not yet established yourself as a trusted consultant and business partner, they will likely call you with a developed plan that they just want you to execute.

Let's see what this looks like. John and Maria both work at a global hospitality company. (Size and industry are truly irrelevant here.) John is the director of the marketing department and Maria works in learning and development (L&D). John contacts Maria and says, "We really need a workshop or training on communication. We want to put 30 people through it before the quarter ends." If Maria is not thinking like a consultant, she might say something like, "Yes, we have a 90-minute workshop on communication,

and I have a facilitator that can deliver it on these dates." She and John will set it up and deliver it, both feeling pretty good about how they worked together to address a problem. And you know what is likely to happen? It probably won't solve the real problem and later the training will be deemed a waste of time or the L&D department will be seen as ineffective.

But if Maria steps into her role as a consultant, the interaction with John will go more like this.

John: "The team is missing key deadlines and some things have gone out with errors that someone should have caught."

Maria: "Is everyone on the marketing team involved?"

John: "No, it's really the coordination between the content team and the social media group. Ten people total. Right now, they either miss the deadline and get it right or we get it out the door on time but then we find errors."

Maria: "What would it look like if everyone was performing optimally?"

John: "People would follow the project plan to the letter. We would make release deadlines and what we release would be high-quality and error-free."

Maria: "When you think about these 10 people, do they have the skills they need to make the shift? And is anyone doing an outstanding job at this?

John: "Yes, I think they need to have better time management and error-checking skills. Kelly and Abdi are my top performers and they're doing the best."

Maria: "Do you know what they're doing differently than the rest of the group?"

John: "No, but they've been here the longest. I wonder if they've come up with some helpful strategies?"

As you can see, Maria's questions were vital for getting to the heart of the matter on John's team. And they are now going to leverage their internal experts, Kelly and Abdi, to create something that it much more focused on solving the real problem.

Below, see my list of consulting questions—as you use them, the process will get smoother. In fact, as your client gets familiar with the process they will likely come to you earlier and ready to engage in the exchange.

Consulting Questions

Remember to step fully into the consultant role, so you can focus on listening for the real problem that needs to be solved. Often clients come to us having already engaged in a diagnostic process and they have likely made assumptions about what they think is a good solution without necessarily breaking the problem down enough to know.

To establish rapport, you'll want them to feel that you are truly listening. You may need to artfully validate the work they have already done and gently invite yourself to explore further with them, so that you can design the best solution possible.

Kick it off by asking for their help: *Is it okay if I ask you a few questions? This will help me design the best solution for you.* Then ask these types of questions to unpack the problem:

1. What

Envision that the client is painting you a picture and if a portion of the image is fuzzy or missing details, ask them about it. You should feel that you are seeing exactly what they are seeing.

I want to make sure I fully understand the problem. You said….

[Summarize what you heard.]

Is that correct?

[Listen for new details.]

What is currently happening that is not working? or *Tell me more about what is happening now.*

[Listen for natural follow-up questions.]

2. Who

These questions can be really powerful for homing in on important insights.

Is the whole group involved? or *Who, specifically, is involved with this issue?*

[Listen for natural follow-up questions.]

Do you see any differences between…?

[Based on what you have heard, choose some of the relevant pairings below that might tease out important issues.]

- *new hires and experienced employees*
- *on-site and remote employees*
- *job levels/titles*
- *team A and team B*
- *groupings that might indicate unconscious bias or a diversity/inclusion challenge (gender, race, ethnicity, age, assertiveness, size, etc.)*

3. The Ideal versus the Gap

Now turn to the desired outcome. Focus on what ideal state or optimal performance looks like.

What would it look like if everyone was performing optimally?

How would you measure this? What metrics could you use?

What are the words you would hear and the actions you would see if people were performing optimally?

What is in the way of them performing this way now?

Is anyone already performing optimally/doing an outstanding job at this?

What are they doing differently than the rest of the group? Do they have different…?

- *knowledge*
- *skills*
- *motivation*
- *resources*
- *skills*
- *experience*
- *capacity*
- *environment*

How can we leverage their knowledge/experience to help shift this situation?

4. Solutions

Before you offer your own solutions, see what solutions the client has in mind. This will give you concrete information to consider and respond to.

Based on what we have discussed so far, do you have any new perspectives or ideas about the situation and how to solve it?

What do we still need to learn to design the best solution possible?

Are there any assumptions we need to test or data to gather to gain more clarity?

Based on how your team works, what length of training would be best?

Is there a time of day or week that will be most effective?

What learning format would be most accessible?

[Offer relevant options like self-paced, instructor-led, remote access, etc.]

If our success was completely guaranteed, what bold steps might we choose?

5. Action

Wrap up the consultation by summarizing the highlights of what you have heard so far.

So, what I have noted is ABC. Is that correct? Would you add anything?

What needs our immediate attention going forward?

What are our next steps? What contribution will we each make and by when?

What possible challenges/roadblocks might arise and how might we meet them?

Once you conclude the meeting, I recommend sending a quick email summarizing the highlights and action plan.