

The Realization of a Life-Long Dream by Jerry Schafetz



Through the action learning process I have accelerated my degree program to where I have not only been able to obtain my bachelor's degree but also my master's degree

Growing up as a young boy I had many dreams. They were not the typical ones like “I want to be a fireman or a police officer.” Instead, I always dreamed I would grow up, go to college, and someday own my own business, making more money than I could spend.

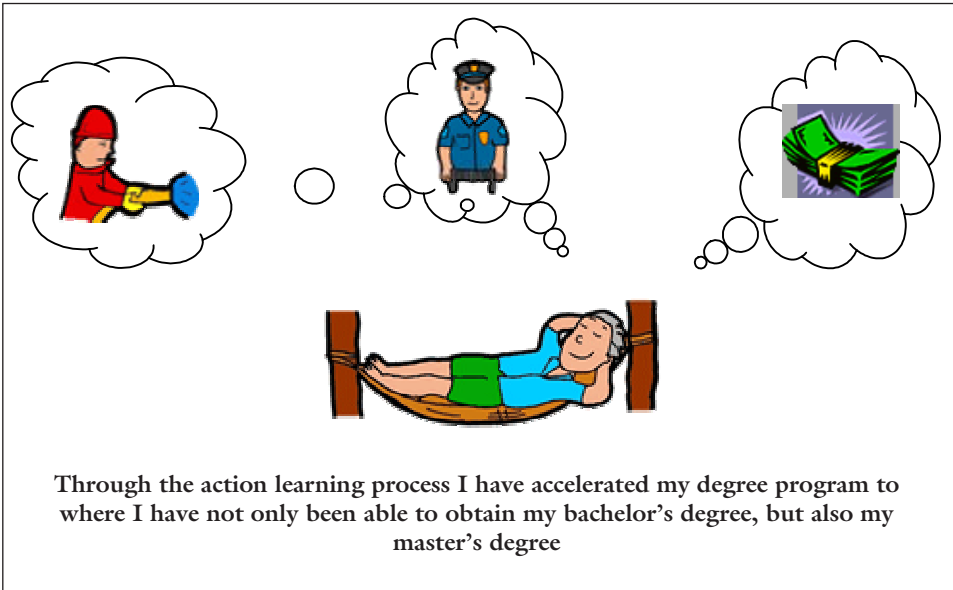
That dream changed a lot over the years. By the time I hit my senior year of High School I was sick of school. I was restless; I wanted to go out and work for a living. But I continued with my education and attended college for one year at Texas A&M University, during which I also worked in a Rent-All center doing mechanical repairs.

I realized how much I enjoyed working with my hands, and when the opportunity came to work in the plumbing business, I jumped at it. Just a few years later I was the owner of my own business. I had accomplished a big part of my dream, without all the college work usually involved. Or did I?

After nearly ten years in the plumbing business I felt my income had stabilized. I was not making the type of money I had expected, and felt I could not communicate professionally with fellow businessmen who had all obtained their college education. Here I was, approaching forty, and about to go through a mid-life crisis.

I ended up selling the plumbing business and taking a job with Sodexho, while also attending DeVry Institute for educational credits. The road ahead seemed long and hard, but I was willing and motivated: I knew I needed the education to develop the skills necessary to survive in today's business climate.

When a job change required me to travel extensively, I moved my education to the University of Phoenix, an online program that traveled wherever my laptop and I went. Although the goal of obtaining my bachelor's degree was finally in sight, it still seemed far away, and the costs were mounting.



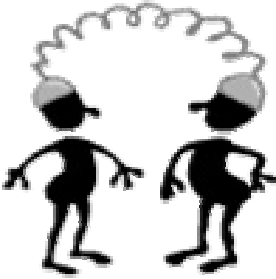
Enter Sodexho University. Through the action learning process I have accelerated my degree program to where I have been able to not only complete the final credits for my bachelor's degree, but also to achieve my master's. I was able to accomplish both of these degrees in less time than it would have taken in a traditional learning environment. The costs were also much less than the traditional method; I finally could afford to reach my dream.

In addition, I was able to utilize the knowledge I have gained through on the job training, including external research on related topics, to obtain my degree while developing the further knowledge I needed to succeed in my position. Some of the work I have done will also better Sodexho's position in the marketplace, a side benefit of getting an education through action learning.

Thank you Sodexho University. Thank you Fred Lastar and Harry Lenderman. Thank you to everybody who has helped me in my quest for a college degree.

Jerry Schafetz is a master's of management degree graduate of Sodexho University

Characteristics and Needs by Robert Richard, Jr.



Action learning is unique in that once a learning team is established the members have to meld their thinking processes into a single output

Members of a learning team usually all have different life experiences and skill sets. Additionally, it is more than likely that there are different personality types in the group. Leaders and followers, hawks and doves, decision makers and enablers – there are a multitude of character traits and, although their method of learning or problem solving may be different, all of their input is vital to ensure that a well thought out solution is reached.

The group comes together and learns how to not only communicate laterally, but also how to develop methods to ensure that everyone’s ideas are heard and understood. For many, this is a great life lesson, as the “do it my way” personality types are humbled when they finally start listening to others and find out that other people can also have good ideas. The “whatever you want” personality type suddenly learns that their ideas are important and relevant to the action learning process.

Everyone has strengths and weaknesses. The action learning process takes this into account and allows everyone’s strengths and weaknesses to be distributed amongst the group so that a team is formed with a common goal and all of the tools necessary to succeed. These are not skills that develop overnight rather, as the process evolves, people seem to blossom and step out of their comfort zones to become a unified force ready to solve problems.

Action learning is effective because it demands that participants open their minds to methods and means that they would have never been able to visualize on their own. It is amazing to see even in everyday situations members of learning teams caucusing about a multitude of decisions. This is because of the power of the process itself. People begin to realize that there may be a different means to an end and action learning is a great way to discover something that is truly “outside the box.”

Additionally, participants begin to feel good about themselves once the goal is in sight. They are excited that they are involved in the decision-making process that led to that goal. Finally, whether or not their ideas are incorporated into the final product, they feel good just knowing that at least their ideas were considered.

Robert Richard, Jr. is a bachelor's of management degree graduate of Sodexho University, Providence Campus



Angela Marchetti and Susan Brown, bachelor degree graduates and creators of the Showcase of Achievement and Sodexho University Commencement ceremony.

My Thoughts on Action Learning by Angela Marchetti



Everything we do, everyday, is action learning – in our jobs, in our personal lives, and even in our commitments to community

The action learning program came at a very good time in my life. After seven years of taking college classes, company training, various tests and unconventional learning courses, I have found that this program gives me the opportunity to roll all that life learning together into my goal of obtaining a bachelor's degree. The process has been interesting, and one thing I have learned is this: everything we do, everyday, is action learning – in our jobs, personal lives, and our commitments to community. As naturally inquisitive beings, people are always searching for something better – whether it is more knowledge, improved skills, or greater appreciation of art, music, or humanity.

As a result of this program I now have a greater appreciation for myself. In the past five years, I have traveled some interesting yet unexpected roads. Although unplanned, these have provided me as much of a canvass to work with as any classroom. Everything that I have experienced is a part of who I am. The total is the sum of its parts, right?

This program has bound together all that I have learned to date and, through projects with the team and on my own, has proven that I am operating at the level of management necessary for the bachelor's degree, that I can lead when required, and that I can follow when appropriate. I now know that I make valuable contributions to the team in both large and small ways every day. However, I also know that what I can learn from others is as valuable as what they can learn from me.

I am on to my next adventure and am looking forward to it. I think with the skills that I have I will be able to ask the right questions, anticipate needs, evaluate data, and go to the next level.

Angela Marchetti is a bachelor's of management degree graduate of Sodexho University

Somehow We All Have the Same Problems by Elvis Rosario



It does not matter whose problem is bigger or more complicated we all have to pitch in and create a solution

Sitting at a “round table” with people from different backgrounds, with apparently different problems, is a unique experience wherein a discussion may evolve into an argument. But if we stop for a minute and discuss the situation instead of arguing about it, we will find out that we all have the same problems and need for a solution.

It does not matter whose problem is bigger or more complicated, we all have to pitch in and create a solution. Twenty eyes can see better than two, and different people will have different approaches. Everyone needs to be open to other opinions. Instead of accusing or pointing fingers, we need to embrace others’ ideas. Being self-sufficient is great, but having somebody to count on is even better.

I am in agreement with Laura Antal of Sodexho University when she said to the Providence team:

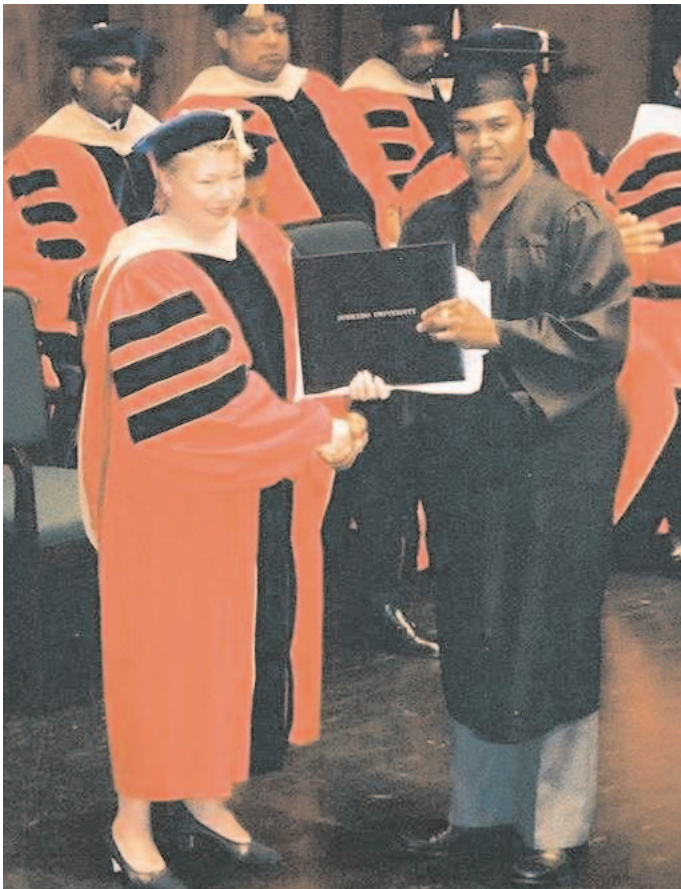
I have learned that leaders have the same characteristics at any level in the company. They are positive, take pride in their work, and want others to succeed. I also see them struggle with the same issues: how to motivate others, how to change a culture that has some negative undertones in some areas and how to communicate effectively and earn respect. I saw the leaders sharing their strategies and teaching each other. I saw openness and willingness to share experiences where people had to deal with difficult situations or employees.

It has definitely been a blessing working with all my classmates on projects such as the video we produced. We should focus on addressing problems of safety, communications, and teamwork, and then on spreading these solutions throughout the entire company. This way, we can reach other Sodexho employees and show them a more realistic way of how real people act, think, and approach a problem.

I hope that this project will help our co-workers have a heightened understanding of problems that have existed but, before action learning, were not priorities to fix. Problems such as communication between management and the hourly employees

were never really resolved until action learning came into our lives. I hope that after addressing these problems, we are more united and will now pull together to achieve common goals. We can view the company as a big family, and families have problems and situations, but at the end of the day we all hug and kiss each other, because we are still a family – the Sodexho family.

Elvis Rosario is an associate's degree graduate of Sodexho University, Providence Campus



Innocencio Elvis Rosario receives his associate degree from Provost.

My First Official Presentation by Joseph Garcia



I learned that if you believe in yourself others will follow, so keep your head up and reach for the sun

My first official presentation (the culmination of my work so far in the program) recently took place, but the pressure of proving myself started several years ago when I decided to no longer attend my local college. At the time, my father strongly disagreed with my decision, but I felt that I was a man and that I had to make my own way in the world.

When I first started working, it was easy because the harsh realities of independence had yet to set in. In making my decision to stand alone, I overlooked how much of a struggle it is to find a job that can support one comfortably. I had to do odd jobs to get by: jobs that made me question my intelligence as well as my potential. I also felt like I had lost my best opportunity to impress my father, who I felt still doubted me. So when I had the chance to join Sodexho University and give a presentation before my teammates, management and, most importantly, my dad, I was excited and ready.

Then the day of the presentation arrived. I became extremely nervous: this was the moment of truth. It is almost as if I did not want it anymore, because I felt like all the people there might just see it as another boring presentation. To me, however, it was a one-shot deal and I could not let my father down again. After I started with my introduction – which, incidentally, was a rap – I realized that the only person I had to prove anything to was myself. From that moment on my nervousness vanished, and I went on to deliver a quality presentation detailing my past year's work. My father stood, impressed, and the presentation was a success. Overall, I learned that if you believe in yourself others will follow, so keep your head up and reach for the sun because even if you miss you are bound to catch a star.

Joseph Garcia is an associate's degree graduate of Sodexho University, Providence Campus

Joseph Garcia, associate degree graduate is hugged by Bien Garcia, his father and faculty of Sodexho University.



It All Started a Year Ago... by JoAnn Scott



I feel the main lesson I have learned is that with the right attitude, will, and determination, the sky is the limit

It all started a year ago when a manager came up to me and asked if I would like to get an associate's degree. Being the type of person whose willing to try anything once, I agreed to give it a shot.

At first, however, I did not realize all the work and commitment that was going to be involved. Had I known maybe things would have been different, but after being in the program, I am very grateful for I have learned a great deal personally and professionally from each of my team members. For example, from one co-worker, Stevie, I have learned that in order to succeed one must have drive and determination, while from another, Elvis, I have learned how to be more positive and to think twice before I act or speak. All in all, I have learned a great deal from each of my teammates.

In the end, I feel the main lesson I have learned is that with the right attitude, will, and determination, the sky is the limit. Action learning is a life-altering experience.

JoAnn Scott is an associate's degree graduate of Sodexho University, Providence Campus

JoAnn Scott receives her associate degree from Provost.



Raising Confidence by Charlie O’Brien



Since completing this course, my confidence level is so high that sometimes I scare myself!

As a forty-seven year old man who has been through four years of high school and two years of college, I was a strong believer in classroom learning – but then I entered the Sodexho University action learning program. This experience slowly transformed my whole view of learning as I went through the action learning projects we did as team members. The excitement of the team accomplishing something together was exhilarating. I am now a strong action learning advocate because earning a degree is much more rewarding when working on real, hands-on problems. At Sodexho University, we have the full support of the unions, so it is not only managers from our unit that are being graced with this program, but everyone on both sides of the management/union divide. Imagine spending just a few hours a day after work learning and creating individual projects, and then visualize the great feeling of accomplishment that goes along with it.

Since completing this course, my confidence level is so high sometimes I scare myself! For example, before when I was in a crowded room I was afraid to speak. However, from the action learning team meetings I have learned how to voice my opinions, and that the only stupid question is the one not asked. Also, I know my attitude concerning my job and others has improved tremendously. I now work more comfortably with my peers and I am not afraid to ask for help. I think back to before these classes, and have realized that I often tried to do the impossible by myself. However, I have now gained enough confidence in myself and my abilities to ask for help when I need it, and have learned that my peers are there to help me, and I them.

In conclusion, one of the greatest benefits of action learning is its potential to create a true learning organization. Action learning groups develop values and skills for organizational learning and create a model for the team to follow.

I want to thank Sodexho University and Revans University – The University of Action Learning – for making all this possible.

Charlie O’Brien is a bachelor’s degree graduate of Sodexho University, Providence Campus

Flying Solo: Being the Only Degree Candidate in the Team by Jason Parenteau



As I explained action learning to the team I found that it improved my own knowledge of the concept as well

Just a couple of years ago, if someone had told me that I could earn my bachelor's degree while simultaneously improving my effectiveness as a manager, I would not have believed them. Action learning, however, has made that process possible. My outputs have been directly focused on improving certain aspects of my account. The projects require a team approach, and my first objective has always been to form an action learning team.

At the time, I was the only person at the Attleboro account enrolled in the program, which meant my team would consist of people who were not familiar with action learning. This turned out to be a blessing in disguise. As I explained the concept to the team, I found that it improved my own knowledge of action learning as well.

Our first project was to raise safety awareness among our hourly employees. The group met and discussed a number of ways to do this, and ultimately decided to conduct a Sodexho Safety Fair. The objective of the fair was to raise safety awareness and to reward employees who exhibited safe work practices.

The team also collaborated on a number of other issues, including budgeting, timelines, and location. Ultimately, the Sodexho Safety Fair was a great success, and I believe the management staff gained as much from the experience as did the hourly employees. The entire process proved the effectiveness of action learning and the positive effects it can have, not only on the people enrolled in the program, but also on the company and our clients. Sodexho's custodial manager in Attleboro was so amazed with the program that she is now enrolled and working towards her bachelor's degree as well! Even though I was working alone in the program this year, the action learning process has worked wonders at my unit.

Jason Parenteau is a bachelor's degree graduate of Sodexho University, Attleboro Campus

Sharing the Work Load by Peyton Lewis



Each gear represents a group member; they come into contact with one another at very critical points where the one cog transfers its energy to another, and that one to the next and so on

Through action learning, I have learned not to be so control-oriented and have learned to be willing to step back and let someone else take the lead. I have also learned to fight not only for the things I hold dear but also for those things that are important to others (even if they do not always jive with my own).

Even though my project has ended, I look at the documents and see areas of my performance I would like to improve upon in the future. I am using action learning to continuously try to improve the quality of my communications with others – whether it is verbal, written, or electronic.

If you have taken on a project with which you have been discouraged, see if someone else would like to take up the challenge with you. You may be extremely pleased with the result. My experience with working in these action learning groups reminds me of what the French socialist, Louis Blanc wrote: “Let each produce according to his aptitudes... let each consume according to his need” (Columbia, 2001).

Working in the group dynamic there is a sense of sharing the workload – each member contributes what they are able while at the same time taking away what they need. One can compare working in the group dynamic and Blanc’s theory to the diagram of the gears. Each gear represents a group member: they come into contact with one another at very critical points where the one cog transfers its energy to another, and that one to the next, and so on. Thus one cog gives what it can, while another takes what it needs: the giving and taking work together to keep the whole machine running smoothly. However, this transfer of kinetic energy creates friction – excessive friction can result in a cog or two breaking, which in the long run will result in the breakdown of the machine (group). When the proper amount of lubricant is applied – excessive friction is reduced and the machine (group) runs smoothly. I would like to think that the appropriate lubricant, here, consists of co-operation and understanding.

Peyton Lewis is a master’s degree candidate at Sodexho University, Newark Campus

Growing Professionally As Well As on the Job by Michael Hill



By going through all of these different phases, I was growing professionally and on the job without even realizing it

I have learned a great deal with Sodexho and its university. Because I have been out of school for quite awhile, the classes were a great refresher. I had a lot of catching up to do; for example, I needed to touch up on areas of my writing such as punctuation, grammar, quotations, and other minor areas. My communication skills were also rusty, and I realized that I sometimes had a juvenile attitude. For instance, I would say something like “I don’t care,” or “I’m not doing it,” and I was often insubordinate. Even though I have had many faults, I must say that with action learning as a guide, I have come a long way.

In the past, while I may not have been a lead custodian, I was happy and content with my position. I did not want to deal with management and everything else that came with such a job. Now, when I look back at this past year, I can measure my growth and success. I have gone through many changes and made many sacrifices that have made me a stronger individual. In this job field, you run into all kinds of experiences that give you opportunities to grow. By going through all of these different phases, I was growing professionally and on the job without even realizing it. I knew that there was something special at Gilbert Stuart Middle School because I would hear it from others in the building. It did not matter whether it would be from parents, visitors, management or anyone else who entered: they now all talk about how clean the building is and how quickly the staff responds when there is a problem. Some of the visitors have even written me appreciation letters and have come up to thank me personally! This is where I now get my satisfaction: when I see others happy, talking about how the school has changed for the better. Then I know that my teammates and I are doing one hell of a job. That is when I can smile, pat myself on the back and say “job well done.”

Here is some advice for others just starting the process:

- Learn to take charge and do not be afraid
- Do not sit back because you are scared to say the wrong thing
- Do not worry if people laugh because you have said the wrong thing
- The wrong answers will help you grow physically, mentally and spiritually
- Remember to always give back to the cause
- Staying focused is the key to success
- Give it your all, so you will not have regrets later
- Never give up
- With unity, no job is too big
- Struggles are rewarding in the end
- Be on time
- To be the best, learn from the best

Never jump into it without a plan. I have found that it is usually best to plan ahead of time for a task and not start making it up as I go along. Without a plan, people often waste their time, money and energy. Also it reduces the chance of getting the job done right the first time. Remember, the key is to prepare so time is not wasted.

You cannot tell them anything. Some people think they know everything and you cannot tell them anything. That is when you have to let them learn for themselves what they do not know.

The team and not I. We have all been a part of a team at one time or another, so everyone has at least some knowledge of how to work together. A team is not a team if the members stand alone. So remember, there is no “I” in “team.”

New ideas but no one to listen. Everyone has new ideas; the only problem is that no one wants to listen to them. So you save your ideas for a rainy day, and then everyone has time to listen to them.

Michael Hill is an associate’s degree graduate of Sodexo University, Providence Campus

Michael Hill, Associate Degree Graduate, explains a Smart Book to Dr. Laurent Ndeze, Faculty Sodexo University.



Program Development Utilizing Strategic Thinking and Team Building **by Sandra D. Spencer**



If a goal is worth achieving then the effort expended is also worth it

I would be negligent if I did not take this opportunity to share with others how action learning has affected the way I perceive our business practices and the objectives of our organization. The program has also impacted how I view my role as a Senior Purchasing Manager. The concept of action learning has cultivated in me the habit of focusing on questions to broaden my thinking, reveal the blind spots, and create new insights for developing processes. I have reflected on the character qualities that each team member may possess, and have found that strengthening these character traits allows us to be more effective within the organization.

I believe that, in order for any program to be effective and responsive to the needs of our clients, we must foster the mindset of ownership of our programs. One effective way to do this is to have the support and involvement of those individuals who have the most at stake in the process. I relate this to the skills I have obtained through my use of action learning techniques:

- Creating an environment to learn from each other in a supportive and intellectually stimulating way
- Enabling the participants to take on the real issues, questions, uncertainties, and opportunities that are a part of our decisions
- Encouraging a consensus to convey knowledge with actions, to review the results, draw conclusions, and apply that knowledge to the next challenge

From my start with Sodexo, I have felt my past professional experiences would be an asset to enhancing corporate purchasing, and make a “value-added” to the already gifted professionals on staff. I believed that team building would be one of the

essential elements for the success of our corporate objectives. Networking with our field units on their various sites and areas of responsibility, working and negotiating with present and potential vendors within our programs, conferring with Sodexo staff on issues relating to purchasing programs, dealing with marketing and distribution for our program initiation and roll-out, and networking with accounting to retrieve useful and timely information concerning our purchasing programs for facilities are all elements of team building and networking. These elements lead to strategic thinking or thinking “outside the box.”

The future success of the facilities programs does not rest on the shoulders of one individual, it rests on everyone involved in the process and, yes, even our vendors. If a goal is worth achieving, then the effort expended is also worth it. My experiences thus far with corporate procurement have been challenging, eye opening, and rewarding.

This validates my belief that if an objective is to be met, the parties involved must make concerted efforts to achieve that goal. Team building, communicating, or sharing/imparting the vision are the vehicles to foster this common goal. Through action learning, I hope to see “organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to learn together” (Peter Senge, 1990).

Sandra D. Spencer is a bachelor’s of management degree graduate of Sodexo University, Gaithersburg Campus



Sandra Spencer describes her projects.

Understanding Differences and Overcoming Setbacks by Jessie Richardson



In its extreme, the belief is that African-Americans are “structurally” unemployed and therefore lacking in the skills to get the jobs we desire. Action learning has helped me fight these stereotypes by helping me build confidence in my work and myself

Through Sodexo University, I have learned how to better appreciate my surroundings and not to take things for granted. I have also learned that we should not be stagnant, but must always keep progressing, and that personally, I need to stay on an even keel. In other words, I have learned to not get too high with the highs or too low with the lows. I have learned to be respectful of others, even if they are not my favorite person to deal with.

I have learned that others viewed high unemployment among African-Americans as us being of a much lower skill level as well as supposedly less productive. This general assumption helped convince some that pushing towards full-time employment for African-Americans would be unachievable. In its extreme, the belief is that African-Americans are “structurally” unemployed and therefore lacking in the skills to get the jobs we desire. Action learning has helped me fight these stereotypes by helping me build confidence in both my work and myself.

Everything about this opportunity has been a blessing. A person must have ambition to succeed in life. In the end, the people who have achieved will look back on their life and say, “Wow, I accomplished that!” The rest will have to look back and say, “I did nothing!” And when it comes to summing up life’s experiences, having done nothing is a terrible thought.

Successful business depends on accountability from everyone, everyday. In order to grow and prosper, a business must have standards and integrity. Knowing that what I do helps other people gives me a sense of immense satisfaction. Sodexo University is a great chance to control one’s future and the freedom to come and go as desired.

There has to be a creative passion for all that one does, no matter what the job. I have the ability and confidence to continue to grow in Sodexho. I try not to get down about mistakes. There is always a lesson to be learned from them. I take the good, leave the bad, and then move on. I know that I will just make a better decision next time.

What do I want out of this business management degree? I want to try to teach others what I have learned. I want to offer opportunities to people who otherwise do not get many. I want to replace low self-esteem in others with a high self-image. I want to get to the point where the company sponsors job offerings in which local youth spend a day at the company learning about different occupations. The program could even be expanded to local homeless shelters and senior-citizen organizations. The possibilities are endless.

To get Sodexho's name out there, we must be out there. We must show how we support diversity and be willing to break down the perceived barriers and stereotypes of African-Americans, and we can do this by balancing a diverse workplace through equal opportunities of educational growth.

Jessie Richardson is an associate's degree graduate of Sodexho University, Providence Campus

Action Learning: A Way of Life by Judi Brubaker



Once you begin to use action learning as a tool to solve problems it affects every aspect of your life

Action learning is a tool that can and should be used to help develop teamwork, team spirit and a true sense of accomplishment. Action learning has helped develop my facilities support group into a team by teaching us to truly listen to each other, accept our differences, and find the real roots of problems.

Before action learning, our group shared the same end-goal, but was definitely not a team. We called ourselves a team and wanted to work together as one, but we were only a team in the abstract sense. We needed to face facts – we had lost our sense of spirit.

Teamwork, like action learning, is a continual process. It takes patience, concentration, constant awareness, open-mindedness and understanding. Through action learning, we have learned to brainstorm, really listen to one another, normalize and focus on processes. We have each learned how to individually take the lead when the rest of the group needs a change of pace, and we are still learning about all the skills and talents we possess. However, one of the most important lessons we have learned is that what we thought was the problem sometimes ends up being only a small slice of the pie.

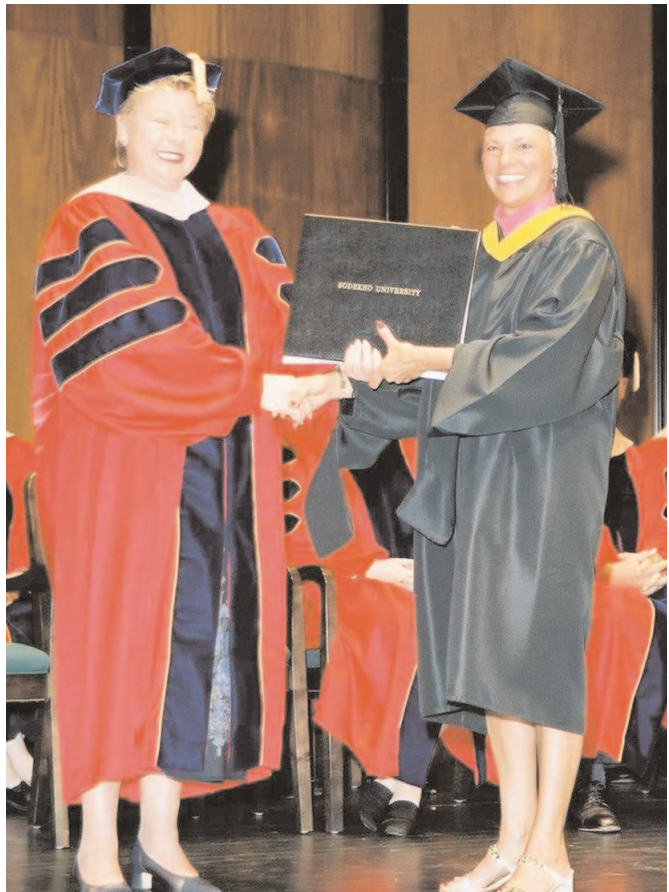
When the concept of action learning was first introduced to our group, I was enthusiastic but skeptical. We were a sorry, victimized bunch and were helpless to do anything about it. After all, no one listened to us anyway. I was responsible as their manager to help this group become a team but I had no idea where to begin.

The facilities support group met almost daily in those first few weeks and I learned more about action learning than I ever wanted to know (Mostly about storming!). It took us over four months to get to the root of the problem: we had many internal issues within the group itself that were preventing us from truly becoming a team. This was a hard lesson to learn (and for me, as their manager, to accept); but finally all of that “storming” paid off. Once we dealt with the issues within our

group, we were able to work together as a team and actually produce results: senior management finally listened to us and we were able to save the company \$90,000+ during our first project together. We did this by reducing the amount of unnecessary work we were doing, but most importantly, we achieved this by working as a team. My once helpless, victimized team now works together to solve problems, saving the company money and learning from each other like we never have before.

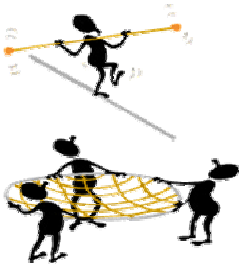
Once people begin to use action learning as a tool to solve problems, it affects every aspect of their lives. Obstacles are no longer viewed as insurmountable because the hurdles are overcome one by one to get to the root of the problem. Individually, one gains the confidence to speak up and challenge what does not feel right. Additionally, people gain confidence and the security that, if someone falls short in their self-expectations, the team will be there to help carry the individual through the rough spots.

Judi Brubaker is a master's of management degree graduate of Sodexho University, Newark Campus



Judi Brubaker receives her master's degree from Provost.

My Personal View by Ninnie M. Carey



I have learned to trust my fellow teammates in ways that I never would before

Looking back at the year spent with action learning, I must admit that it has been one of the most fun yet painful years of my life. As a result, though, I think I have grown up a lot and that our team has learned to value, communicate and respect each other in ways we previously did not. We are not afraid to speak up anymore and are better prepared to deal with interpersonal issues, taking the “bull by the horns,” so to speak.

I know I was very excited when first introduced to action learning over a year ago, but I did not think it would last, nor did I expect to see graduation. I am really amazed and proud to be a part of the Sodexho Class of 2003, and I know I could not have done it without my team members, who helped me when I was feeling down about projects. We all pulled together and formed an amazing little group that functioned almost perfectly in every meeting. I thought that because we had our boss in our group, we would feel intimidated and feel like she had to always be right and in charge. However, right from the beginning, we put her in her place. We made sure that during our action learning meetings she was an equal, not an overseer. I was surprised how well she took it, and how well we adapted and accepted her as one of us throughout the program.

I have learned to trust my fellow teammates in ways that I never would before. In my little group that worked together for three of the four team outputs, we had an early understanding that we could not all be there for all the meetings, but we decided that it would not hold the rest of the group up.

Ninnie M. Carey is a master’s of management degree graduate of Sodexho University, Newark Campus

Is It Myth, Mystery or Reality? by George G. Bernardon



Action learning allows individuals as well as teams to look at what has been accomplished, analyze it, and take on the task of improving or retrofitting it to perform better

Since the beginning of recorded time, humankind has learned from the experiences of its members. Through trial and error, observation, or the necessity to survive we have learned methods, practices and ways to better exist and make life easier or more comfortable. Whether it was fire, the wheel, military equipment or something simple, all was a learned process thought out and then implemented. One person may have had an idea that worked great only to have someone else come along and improve upon it.

Action learning is no different. It allows individuals as well as teams to look at what has been accomplished, analyze it, and take on the task of improving or retrofitting it to perform another task. People who think constantly and are self-motivated can succeed using the “action learning university” concept. It, however, is not for the unmotivated.

For me, it was a time of reflection and organization. When looking over all that I have accomplished and created in my job over the years, I feel a “wow” factor. Wow, did I really do all that?

My job was unique in that, when I took it in 1991, it was a newly created position without a job description, and no one really knew what the expectations were for it. All forms used in my day-to-day work were thus necessarily self-created. I have had many mentors throughout the years, and each has provided me with a learning environment, experience, a method, or a process that has allowed me to be successful.

Action learning is a great example of on-the-job learning. It is because of the demands of the job and the self-willed drive to succeed, as well as the people who have influenced me over the years, that I have achieved what I have. Action learning is a collaborative effort, not an individual one. When the surrounding environment and people are successfully utilized, not learning is impossible.

The process of action learning should take Sodexho and any other company that utilizes it to the next level through the internal resources that it already has. So, to answer the question of myth, mystery or reality: well, as we say down south, “show enuff, its real!”

George G. Bernardon is a master’s of management degree graduate of Sodexho University, “In Flight Campus”



Richard Lenderman, Associate Dean of Facilities College receives his MSc in Learning and Development from Provost.

A Learning Experience by Joan S. Peelman



I would not hesitate to recommend action learning to anyone seeking an alternative method of learning

Action Learning has changed my paradigm as to how learning can be achieved. It truly is an effective way of learning – through action. This process has allowed me to learn skills that I may not have been able to develop had I been in just a classroom setting. Action learning has expanded my mind and forced me to think and analyze information instead of simply memorizing data. It also has allowed my learning to go toward a real concept, in a real world setting instead of simply theorizing. I have learned first hand, through trial and error, problem-solving different scenarios and analyzing challenges as a method of achieving a desirable outcome. At least for me, learning through “hands-on” experience is the most effective way to learn.

Through this learning process I now have a better understanding of my role as a purchasing manager and of how to contribute in a greater role for the company. I also now have a different perspective of the department as a whole and how each purchaser’s actions, or lack thereof, contributes to the success or failure of the department. I now understand the main reason for Marc Boesch’s, Vice President of Purchasing, assignment of analyzing and verifying the financial forecast. It helped me see and understand all the factors that play into a successful program, and how to achieve objectives by using resources as effectively and efficiently as possible.

In many ways, this was much more difficult than any college course I could have taken because I have had to write exactly how and what I learned, instead of just taking a test and receiving a score. It has broadened my scope of understanding and overall thinking as I can better see my role in the organization. It has brought together pieces of information that would otherwise have just remained bits of unconnected information. The process I used to develop and create my outputs was also very effective. I particularly like the flexibility of structuring the outputs in a

way that articulates my ability to learn and describes my personal development. As long as I meet expected criteria and prove that learning has taken place, the process of action learning has been achieved.

The self assessment and standard review criteria checklists were excellent tools I used to stay focused while overcoming obstacles and issues as they related to the company. The process caused me to ask more questions, which inevitably led me to search for more answers, ultimately giving way to additional learning.

Action learning was definitely more powerful than I could have imagined. Being able to apply my learning to the job was a bonus. I would not hesitate to recommend action learning to anyone seeking an alternative method of learning. It is an effective, motivating, and innovative way of learning, and I am honored to have been a part of the action learning program through Sodexho University.

Joan S. Peelman is a bachelor's of management degree graduate of Sodexho University, Gaithersburg Campus



Louise Salinski, Judi Brubaker, Ninnie Carey, Francine Dowd and Jerry Schafetz describe their learning experiences

Action Learning Means Learning from the Community by Jorge Cardenas



By using action learning I have had the opportunity of educating the community and informing them who we are

Despite originally coming to this country with little command of the English language (and at the same time being quite dazzled by the new customs and advancements) I now have a lot of influence in both my job and local community. I have seen many fellow newcomers to America take up the challenge of learning and demonstrating what they can contribute. I have also seen others who have let the difficulties overcome them, forcing them to return to their homeland. I feel it is important to have a voice in the community. To see those that are highly educated and have so much to give but choose to settle for so little hurts me. In the community, you can catch wind of opportunities that will broaden your potential. It is important to be a voice in decisions and changes that not only will affect the individual, but also will affect others in the future.

By using action learning, I have had the opportunity of educating the community and informing them who we (as different ethnic groups) are. Through community learning, we embrace the challenges put in front of us, become active members by being the voice for others, and take great pride in being part of the change. Most of all, however, we become part of the community.

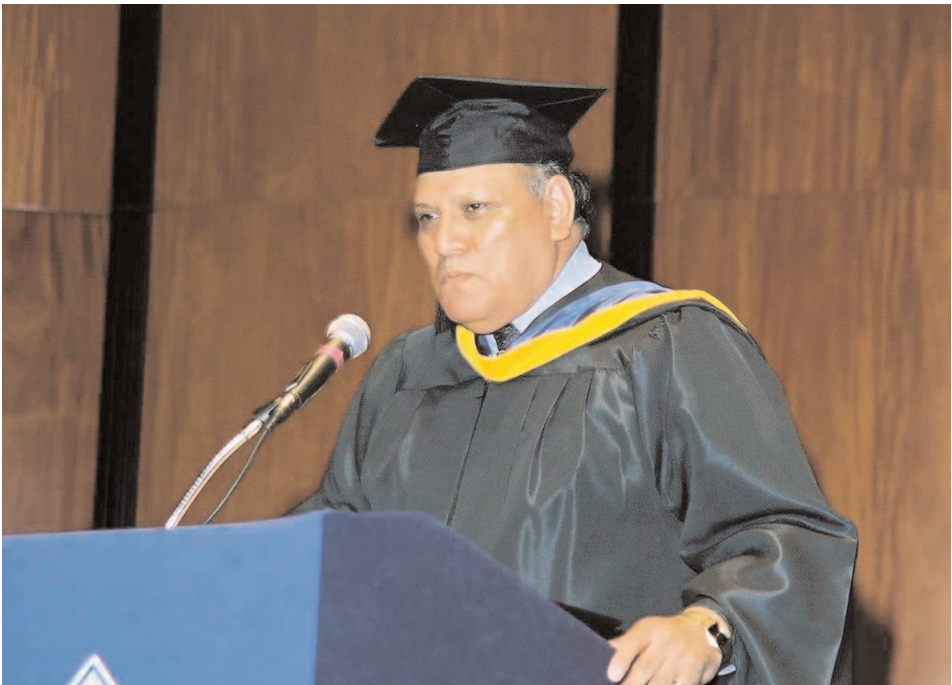
We should never forget who we are – our origin, our country, or our language. Even though we are greatly influenced by this country of many opportunities, we should never forget from whence we came. I am currently presenting Sodexho University to many people – my friends and comrades – from other countries to help them carry out their dreams of success in the United States.

Recently, one of the community agencies that we deal with, the Lead Greater Neighborhood Services, invited me to take part in a meeting. They were looking into ways of preventing lead poisoning in the community, and wanted to reach as many parents and students as possible. We formed an action learning committee and created an event that would reach the maximum number of citizens in the city

of Providence. We created a plan, with a budget, and, while we started with only three agencies, we ended up with twenty-five, including the mayor of the city. We were recognized for our efforts with citations and such, but the greatest reward for those involved was in being able to reach out and help thousands of people become better educated.

In conclusion, I have grown as a community leader and currently am serving as a board member on many community agencies. The community has seen the change in me and, rather than me going to various agencies, they now come to me for advice and suggestions.

Jorge Cardenas is a master's degree graduate of Sodexho University, Providence Campus



Jorge Cardenas, Master of Management, makes the class response.

Action Learning – It Changed My Life by Rosalyn R. Bryan



Just as I knew it would happen, I was being given instructions on how I was to proceed with my project. I had to “fight” to keep the project my own

I work in the Trust Department of an Estate Planning firm where 95% of my job is After Death Trust Administration. We provide a valuable service during one of the most difficult times in a person’s life, the death of a spouse or a parent. Usually our clients are overwhelmed by the tasks they now face, and often have little or no idea of what needs to be done regarding the trust estate. They are usually relieved to turn the burden over to someone else. When I started action learning last year, I was miserable with my job; I had to force myself to go to work every day. I was working at a job I loved in a situation I hated. I was at a company where the owner saw almost no value in my position or me.

When I was presented with the opportunity to enroll in the action learning program, I saw it as a way out of my miserable situation. In fact, that was the plan for my outputs: how to successfully pass along my current position to my successor, followed by what I needed to do to successfully make a career change. My first step toward that goal was to write a procedure manual for the After Death Trust Administration process. As I worked on the manual, I realized it would always be a “work in progress” because new situations were always coming up. I also realized that I needed someone else to review my work and give me feedback as to its effectiveness. If a co-worker who is not familiar with the process could follow the steps in the manual and effectively perform each task, my output would be a success; if not, I would have to rewrite whatever did not work.

I did not want to share my output with the owner of the company; I wanted to wait until it was complete and give it to the company as a parting gift. I knew that if the owner saw what I was doing, he would try to take over and tell me how to do it. As it turned out, someone, with the very best of intentions, did share it with the owner. He was impressed and, for the first time in at least two years, he was interested in discussing something I was doing with me. He suddenly saw the value

of both my job and me. That was a nice feeling, but not enough to entice me to stay any longer than it took to complete my final projects.

Even though he was enthusiastic about my project, just as I predicted he started giving instructions on how to proceed with it, what to say in it, where to put which instructions, etc. I was also told that I would work on this project for at least two hours a day on company time. This is when I learned the real value of standing up for what I believe in. If I worked on this on company time it would no longer be mine; it would not be worth anything to me. I explained that this project was a very personal goal for me; I had not worked on it on company time and did not wish to do so now. I firmly explained that if I was forced to make this a work project, it would lose value for me and the quality of the final product would not be the same. I had to fight to keep the project as my own, and my determination paid off: I was successful. Additionally, in the process of defending my position, I earned the respect of the owner.

As I was nearing completion of my last output, the entire structure of my degree program underwent a dramatic change. My original plan to complete this procedure manual and leave it for my successor when I changed careers altered drastically the day I was contacted by a “head hunter.” I was interviewed by another firm and offered a position in their legal department as a trust administrator. I accepted the opportunity and gave my two weeks notice. At that point, I still had not completed my procedure manual, but I gave my word that I would complete it and it would still be my gift to the company. However, when it came time to leave, I discovered that it was much harder than I thought it would be. I expected to be happy, instead I spent most of my last day in tears.

This should have been the end of my story. I left on good terms, knowing that I had done a high-quality job. However, it turned out not to be the end, but a whole new beginning. The job I accepted did not even last two months: the entire legal department was closed down and the legal staff was laid off. I now had the time during business hours to deliver my completed procedure manual to my previous employer as I had promised. When I walked in the door I was immediately (well almost, they did say hello first) offered my old job back, and at a nice salary increase as well. Hopefully this will be a new beginning where professional relationships I build and renew are based on respect and knowing the value of the entire staff – from the owner all the way down to the college kids who, while just temporary summer help, also have so much to offer as they gain experience in the work force.

Rosalyn R. Bryan is a bachelor's degree candidate at Revans University