

## **Make It Self-Funding**



**Each new student is asked to make a reasonable contribution toward the tuition needed to accredit their work and pay for administration costs to support the records to keep the program in good stead with the accrediting authorities**

Even though action learning is not a new concept, at some point it will be new to you or your company. At Sodexho, we are finishing our pilot year of the action learning degree program for Sodexho University. Like any new concept, it takes time to get things off the ground. I would like to think that our forty graduates this first year have gained a great deal from the program. You can decide for yourself when you read the chapters that they have written.

We have had great success with the process of action learning degrees from a return on investment standpoint. The hard work paid off for our students personally and their efforts paid off for the company as well. One output from a group in Delaware saved the company more money than it spent on the action learning degree program.

We are now starting an open enrollment of students for the next year's program. We have lists of individuals who found out about the Sodexho University action learning degrees and we anticipate four hundred students being enrolled in the next year. A real win for the company in terms of economics is that the program can be self-funding with a rather small contribution by the students, coupled with the fact that Sodexho already employs the faculty for their program.

There is a real gain in the outputs that our people have produced. They have taken on projects that are far more complex and difficult than they ordinarily would have done. There is something to be said for the commitment of our students, as their extra efforts more than make up for the investment the company has made in them. Each new student is asked to make a reasonable contribution toward the tuition needed to accredit their work and pay for administrative costs to support the records necessary to keep the program in good stead with the accrediting authorities.

This is a win-win situation, where both the student and the company can benefit while not really costing either a lot of money. If I were an investor, I would gladly place my money on these action learning teams. They have more than paid for themselves in terms of saving money for the company and customer satisfaction.



*From left, Robert Richards, Robert Richard Jr., Charlie O'Brien, Susan Brown, Miosotis Alsina, Michael Burgess, Jim Norberg, (behind podium Michael DeFietas, Louis Ricci, Jorge Silva) describe their learning experiences.*



*Maura Daly, Communications Manager Sodexo University, interviews some of the class of 2003.*

## Getting Started with Action Learning (Installing)



**We have overcome many obstacles to reach our goals of stabilization and continuous success in the program**

After completing two years of missionary service to Spain, I truly thought life had ended. I could not comprehend how I was going to be able to make any sort of difference in anyone's life if I was not serving with the zeal of a missionary. After this past year of piloting the action learning accredited degree program, my vigor to serve and help others has once again been engaged, and I am sure that this is a great way to enlighten and empower people.

Recently, I had the opportunity to present the degree program to a team of teachers' assistants in a nearby middle school. While giving the presentation, I reflected back to our first steps of implementation and installation. I realized that we have overcome many obstacles to reach our goals of stabilization and continuous success in the program, but we are still in the infant stages of development. This is the beauty of action learning: the more you learn, the more you realize you need to learn, and the more motivated you are to continue learning!

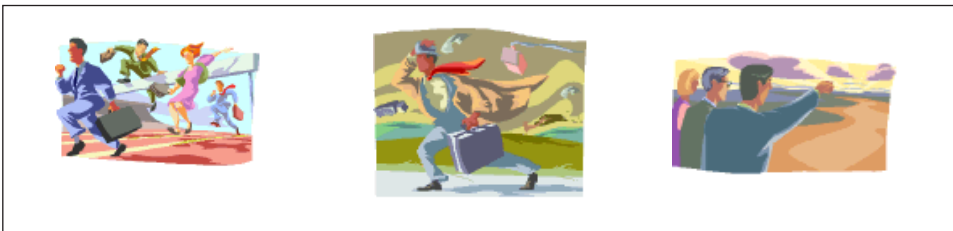
The following are a few points outlining some of the lessons I have learned in regards to implementation this past year. Certainly this list is not comprehensive; however, when faced with some of these very obstacles, our hope is that it will be easier for one to navigate through the hurdles. Good luck!

- **Do not worry, they probably will not understand at first.** The concept of becoming reflective practitioners is not easy to grasp at first. In fact, while presenting, I have found that there are generally three types of people:
  1. The early believers. These tend to be the people who see the value in action learning and the practitioners' degree.
  2. The late believers. This group tends to include those who need to see others participate in the program before understanding the value.

3. The non-believers. These are those who believe that the only way to learn is through the traditional system (note: few learners tend to fall into this group.)

- **There will be questions.** Be prepared to answer all types of questions, but keep in mind that people need to take responsibility for their own learning. Do not answer questions the learners should be answering for themselves.
- **Get started now!** Do not let your associates wait. If they do not get started right away, other responsibilities can suck them away and they may never get going.
- **Keep a learning log.** I have found that it is like pulling teeth to get people to keep a writing log. However, it will come back to haunt the ones who do not keep one. Have everyone write down the “eureka” moments as they occur. It will help them keep their focus when the program gets tough.
- **Some teams will try to quit. Do not let them.** Have each of the associates help each other during these tough times.

Keep a list of items while going along. Soon, there will be a list to help the next group install the program!



## **Learning Versus Training by Robert Richards**

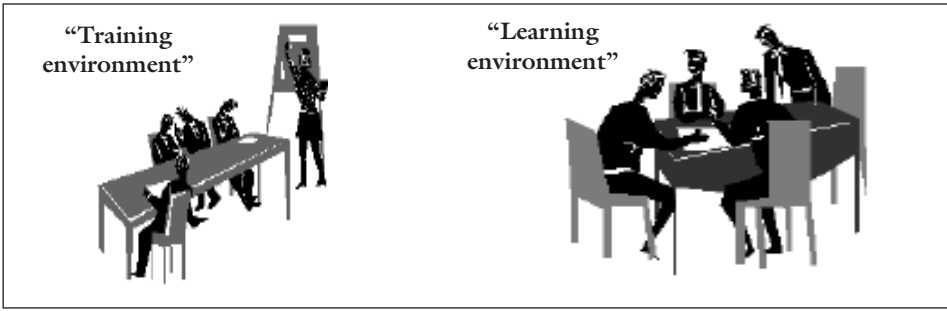


**Sodexo University is a forum where all the great work that has been developed by our leaders in training can now be utilized through the concept of learning instead of simply training**

During the past twenty-seven years I have had the opportunity to manage several large custodial, maintenance, and ground operations, employing in total over 4,000 people. I realized early in my career that, in order to be successful, I had to make a sincere commitment and effort to assist my team in developing the requisite skills necessary to effectively reflect the company's purpose and mission. I strongly desired to create an environment where employees contributed all of their talents and skills to the success of organizational goals. I have always believed that there is a better way to motivate our workforce other than the use of disciplinary action and workplace stress. In that spirit of thinking, I have embraced dozens of training programs and philosophies intended to create this desired result.

Throughout my career, I have spent hundreds of hours implementing and participating in training sessions and have always found the results to be the same: nobody really seemed to learn anything. Of course, there are always a few employees that take something positive from the training sessions and attempt to apply it, but eventually they seemed to always return to their old operating habits. Quite frankly, this outcome always puzzled me. I could not understand why nobody learned. This phenomenon plagued me for years until, recently, I was introduced to the Sodexo University and the process of action learning. Let me qualify my position with a few examples.

During my seven years with Sodexo, I have witnessed first-hand what I have considered to be some of the best training manuals and training initiatives. I soon realized that most of this great information is fragmented throughout several different manuals, and that no one centralized training philosophy existed. It seemed to me that great minds were working independently to formulate what they believed were training concepts that would accomplish our company's goal of operational consistency. However, the results were always the same: no real learning occurred.



Perplexed by their own inability to effect desired results, I overheard many trainers, human resources (HR) professionals, and above-the-unit level leaders express why they felt their training was ineffective. They realized that the information was fragmented and had to be extracted from dozens of training manuals and compiled into one source, taking the best of all ideas and practices to create training concepts that would accomplish their goal of operational consistency. Soon thereafter came the birth of Project B.U.I.L.D. Many of our company's greatest minds contributed their talents and skills to create this training initiative. I was also involved in the early stages of Project B.U.I.L.D.'s development, and many of our best practices from our Providence Facilities account are evident throughout this training program.

Upon completion and review of Project B.U.I.L.D., I personally considered it to be one of the best training programs. I believed that this program was going to work, as it was geared towards providing tools and management concepts that would eventually have all of our managers and general managers operating on the same level. After months of preparation and implementation, and a great deal of enthusiasm, I excitedly made my observations. Disappointingly, the results were still the same: no real learning had occurred.

Quite honestly, I could not believe it myself! How could this great work not be effective? Other outstanding programs followed, such as S.S.L.P. and Train the Trainer, created by individuals that have a real passion for developing people. Brilliant professionals with great ideas, attempting time and again, to create programs that hopefully would be effective; however, again: no real learning occurred.

Soon came "the blame game," especially geared towards the facilities groups. I heard some say, "The facilities groups are resistant to change. They are tough groups that simply do not want to be trained; they are difficult to reach." Although there is some truth to that belief, it does not adequately explain the training failings, nor does it solve the problem. Our managers did not engage the "web of influence" necessary for operational success; there was great inconsistency from unit to unit regarding community outreach policies, political affiliations, being vulnerable at renewal time, the inability or unwillingness to work together to

accomplish our company's mission and goals. I would repeatedly ask myself, "What is the problem with 'traditional' training? Why aren't people learning?"

Over the past few years, I have engaged in numerous conversations with my peers from different units, have recalled my past experiences from training sessions, and have formulated the following opinion as to why traditional training is ineffective. My first observation is what I call, "Choke-on training." For example, Project B.U.I.L.D., S.S.L.P., and Train the Trainer took hundreds of hours to develop and hundreds of thousands of dollars to implement. The intention was to roll it out across the country in 2-3 day training sessions. How can we take hundreds of hours of great work and cram it into someone's brain in just sixteen hours? Most people cannot compute that amount of information in such a short time. The end result is my second observation: "Boredom and Frustration."

Ask most managers and trainers what obstacles they face in participating and conducting what we hope will be effective training, and you are likely to hear "boredom" and "frustration" as the top reasons. Simply stated, most workers are bored with most training sessions. The result of this boredom is that employees fail to retain important information. Even the trainers learn to take up this position and excuse the process. They know nobody really wants to be there. They make comments such as, "If everyone cooperates, returns from breaks on time, and actively participates, we will do everything we can to get everybody out of here as quickly as possible." What is wrong with this picture? Well, it assumes on every level – from the trainers to the trainees – that they are simply carrying out rote functions with the sole purpose of finishing as soon as possible. While I think we would all agree that most employees genuinely appreciate training and the sincere efforts of training coordinators, my experience has shown me that most people are bored and frustrated with current training formats and programs.

For some trainers, boredom and frustration may not appear to be significant obstacles to a training environment. After all, how many students enjoy every course they have to study, and what is wrong with a little boredom anyway? Not everything can be fun and exciting, right? WRONG! The problem with this line of reasoning is that boredom and frustration usually result in poor retention of important information and a subsequent lack of learning. Failure to learn important information is harmful to operational integrity and our future as a company. It was not until this past year that I understood the difference between a "training environment" and a "learning environment," and I have learned this through the action learning process.

Sodexo University began its action learning program in our Providence Facilities account in June of 2002, and over the past year the results have been amazing. Our management team has grown intellectually, and now has more respect for each

other's ideas and contributions. We have learned that, to be successful, we need each other's cooperation and support. We have learned that working together to solve real work problems not only creates the necessary solutions, it also makes our jobs easier. For years, I have heard the "team concept," "the team, the team," but I have never really seen it work until now. Our team now understands that we must be in a continuous learning mode and that our previous style of training no longer applies. We have to accurately assess our operational needs and plan learning accordingly.

Creating relationships and strategies for account retention has always been at the top of the list of training initiatives. What better way to evaluate the effectiveness of training than to have our participants demonstrate, in writing, what they have learned? We are always concerned with whether or not our managers are doing everything possible in the process of renewing our business. Through action learning, we are required to demonstrate what actions we have taken, and submit, in project form, a team plan in order to secure the renewal of the account. The same applies to all of our other training objectives: they can all be achieved by having our employees prove what they have learned.

We currently have seven hourly employees enrolled in Sodexho University's action learning accredited degree program, and quite honestly, I have been stunned at their rapid learning, development and growth. We have custodians writing comprehensive business plans and facilities smart books, creating training videos, understanding the importance of our company's mission and values, and, as they themselves have stated, attempting to "clearly understanding the big-picture," and sharing it enthusiastically with their peers. We have a new level of excitement at our unit, something that I have never experienced before. I am proud to be part of an organization that has figured out how to properly educate its people. To have a workforce with a learning state of mind will certainly separate us from our competitors.

Through Sodexho University and the action learning process, we will soon have a workforce unlike any other – one that is truly receptive to learning. Sodexho University is a forum where all the great work that has been developed by our leaders in training can now be utilized through the concept of learning instead of simply training.

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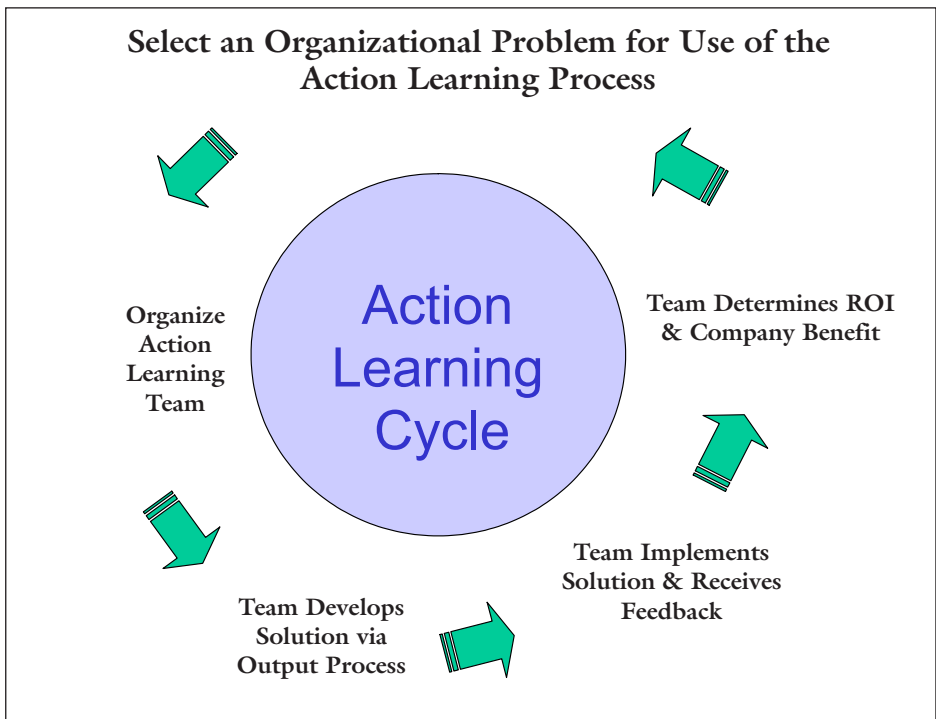
**Robert Richards** is the General Manager of the Providence Facilities, and is a master's degree graduate of Sodexho University.



## The Process by Dr. Arif Khan

I feel the process of action learning in my life has come full circle, and I am at the point of starting another action learning project.

The figure below shows how I envision the action learning problem-solving approach instituted in our project at Sodexo.



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Arif Khan, M.B.A., D.B.A

## Powerful Stuff by Betsy Talbot



**From action learning comes active thinking. I see many advantages to harnessing this energy**

Action learning is powerful stuff, and it is a motivational tool. The energy of teams is often contagious. People are receptive when you ask them to express their opinions about a problem or a situation, and, subsequently, they bring forth creative ideas for resolution. It certainly works better than forcing a solution that does not quite fit. Somehow it works out better when the learners contribute to the outcomes; they feel rewarded in some way. I have been involved with our “Back to School Celebration” plans for some months now. Members of that team are using action learning without even knowing it. We have developed sub-committees that include site coordinators, sponsorship, activities and entertainment, and advertisement and media. I see many advantages in harnessing the energy of the sub-committees to do some good in the community, which is part of our mission. We grasp the value of learning from each other, as we are a large group from numerous agencies with different talents, knowledge and resources. I love working on this project and the event is not even until August. The synergy is great and we make real progress at every meeting.

I have also had the pleasure of sitting in on the Sodexo University associates team here in Providence. I have watched them come such a long way. They have their moments, and I keep tabs on them regularly. They really are excited about what they are doing and strive to move forward. They realize that they do make a difference and are learning from each other in ways they never imagined. As a lifelong learner myself, it is a beautiful thing to observe. They have matured through this process of learning and have gained more self-esteem. They are so supportive of each other and I try to coach and show my support to them.

From what I can tell, action learning is far better than the traditional method of education utilizing classroom lectures and readings. It’s a real “let’s put our heads together” approach to problem solving. In the end it seems you ask yourself “can we do more?” It really is self-motivational and tends to create more ideas and more projects. From action learning comes active thinking and ideas.

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**Betsy Talbot** is a master’s of management degree candidate of Sodexo University, Providence Campus

## To Micromanage or Not to Micromanage by Michael DeFreitas



**Action learning has definitely changed how I am going to manage, teach and learn from my team in the future**

Since incorporating action learning into the way I manage, I have learned to avoid micromanaging my team. Before action learning, my belief was that if I needed something done right then I had to do it myself. After a while, taking on every little task and problem on my own wore me out.

Now that I have been introduced to action learning, it has really helped me overcome problems related to micromanaging, such as decreased employee morale and being perceived as a dictator rather than a team player. As a result, work performance and absentee rates among those I manage have improved. I now find it virtually impossible to micromanage, as I make it a point to turn each decision or challenge that we face into an action learning situation, or, in other words, a team effort. This also achieves one of Sodexho's strategic imperatives: inclusion. By including everyone on my team, I find that this not only helps me, but helps my supervisors as well. It greatly improves communication, thus keeping them well informed. It also allows us to learn together as we work on each challenge. I find that a lot of the time, we stumble upon even greater ideas not necessarily tied to the topic being discussed. This creates even more opportunities for us to capitalize on the concept of action learning. It challenges us to work on ways to put in effect the ideas and suggestions of everyone involved.

Also, I have observed how we now instinctively form action learning groups. Anytime we face a problem, we seem to automatically pull together as a team to solve it, sometimes without even realizing it. I learned that by giving someone a choice rather than a directive (whenever possible) makes people feel more involved, as they feel like they are a part of the decision-making process. This helps with maintaining morale and high levels of performance, and assists us in achieving our goal of renewing our five-year contract here in the city of Providence. It is important to get our people's perspective on things. I find that sometimes they have even better ideas on ways to approach a situation than I do.

In conclusion, action learning has helped me realize the power of working as a team. It is a great way to develop not only subordinates, but also oneself as an individual. It has opened my eyes to a more global way of thinking as well as improving my management style. Action learning has definitely changed the focus of how I am going to manage, teach and learn from my team in the future.

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**Michael DeFreitas** is a bachelor's of management degree graduate of Sodexho University, Providence Campus



*The associate degree set, from left, Joe Garcia, JoAnn Scott, Michael Hill, Iyonne Aleman, Jessie Richardson, Elvis Rosario, Stephen Brunetti, describe their learning experiences.*

*Mike DeFrietas and family*



## **Developing Solutions Instead of Giving Them by Stephen Brunetti**



**Developing solutions is action learning. Teams of people get together and combine their ideas. They then develop the most effective idea into a solution**

During my studies in action learning, I found that developing solutions instead of giving them works out much better. People work better when they feel that they are part of the solution. Action learning gives participants a chance to share their ideas with others. It also gives people a feeling of accomplishment.

When included in development, people have a better understanding of what is happening. This can provide unity within a company. Developing solutions is action learning. Teams get together and combine their ideas. They then develop the most effective idea into a solution. This can work for almost any situation and it is the best type of learning that I have seen.

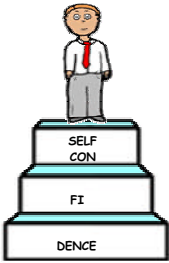
An example of this is when one of our team members was having trouble transitioning into a lead custodian's role. He was a twenty-two year old custodian in a leadership position, dealing with people who had been on the job a lot longer than him. These people were making his job very difficult by not respecting his position of authority. He tried to take care of the situation by himself, but he ran into some roadblocks. Eventually, he was on the verge of quitting because of the difficulty of the situation. Finally, during one action learning meeting, he brought the issue to our attention. We all asked him different questions so that we could gather ideas to develop a solution to help him. Teammates responded immediately. Everyone offered different ideas that he could try. Then we collectively developed the best solution to the problem and discussed how to apply it.

In conclusion, the new lead is now a success at his job. He (as well as our team) now has a sense of accomplishment because we all pulled together and worked out some solutions. Because of the action learning meetings, the new lead better identifies with Sodexho and the employees he is in charge of. If not for the action learning program, he surely would have quit by now. It is remarkable what can happen when solutions are developed as a team.

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**Stephen Brunetti** is an associate's degree graduate of Sodexho University, Providence Campus

## **My Personal Action Learning Process by Jorge Alves Silva**



**I have reached new levels of self-confidence with action learning**

The action learning process has helped me better explain my ideas. It has also helped me build stronger relationships with my managerial counterparts, the custodians, and the principals of the schools, as well as others encountered within both my professional and personal life. I have been able to help my shift team leaders through this same process of becoming better leaders and solving their own problems. As a result, they have advanced greatly as professionals. As for me, besides simply working hard all the time, I now work more efficiently, yielding better results.

Action learning has taught me three key lessons. First, it has taught me to become more involved with my lead custodians. Second, I must develop and increase my lead custodians knowledge and desire to perform. Finally, it has shown me that it is necessary to combine individual development with the problems of Sodexo.

A good story of how I have grown as a result of the program is that about a year ago, I met a gentleman by the name of Richard Lenderman, who wanted all supervisors, managers, and custodians to have the same knowledge and opportunity to gain a degree through the action learning program. In order to achieve this, Richard sacrificed a lot of his time in helping all of us custodians write, think, and ensure that our work was done correctly and properly, as well as making sure that we all thought about “safety first.” Eventually, I asked myself why he spent all this time doing this? The answer I came up with is that Richard had a sincere desire to help my colleagues and me reach new levels of self-confidence. Personally, he has shown me that I can prepare everyone to handle work duties and responsibilities, and has helped me understand my potential to learn. It was a real blessing to have the opportunity to return to school. Truly, it was a dream come true!

As far as giving back to the program and company that has offered me so much, my return on investment so far is:

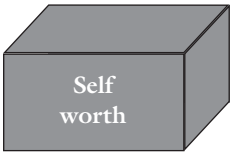
- I have become more competent in my daily tasks as I no longer fear asking questions.
- I have been able to better organize my tasks – not to fight fires – but to solve real problems.
- I have become a more agreeable person, as my attitude has changed towards working in teams.
- My reading skills have increased dramatically.
- I seek opportunities to solve problems in teams instead of simply trying to solve them my way.
- I have a heightened level of self-confidence.

Thank you Sodexo University and Richard Lenderman for helping me prepare for the future and earn my bachelor's degree. This has been a wonderful learning experience. This is my first journey in practitioner's learning, and I have loved every minute of it. It is terrific preparation for my career. I would encourage anyone who is interested in the field of management to take the course in action learning and begin working on their associate, bachelor, or master's degree today!

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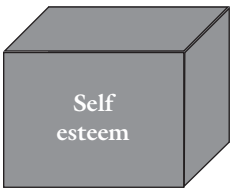
**Jorge Alves Silva** is a bachelor's of management degree graduate of Sodexo University, Providence Campus

## Action Learning Builds Confidence by Louis A. Ricci



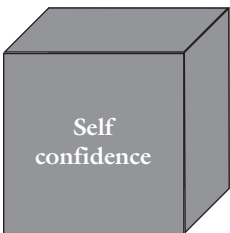
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**Action learning participants become part of a solution regardless of what the group’s problem is. There is an “I can do it” attitude instilled in each individual**



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Action learning is a wonderful tool for the participants as it allows them to gain more self-confidence. The company also benefits by having workers who are not afraid to delve into new and innovative projects. This alone produces a high return on investment for Sodexo. Every action learning participant becomes a part of a solution, regardless of the group’s specific problem. There is an “I can do it” attitude instilled in each individual. Self-esteem is elevated to the highest degree. I have seen evidence that proves these observations.



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As the Assistant Maintenance Manager here in Providence, my duties include the daily assignment of the maintenance staff. Before action learning, I gave out work assignments on a first-in first-out basis. It was while formulating my business plan (originally developed in order to fulfill the required technical part of the bachelor’s degree program) that I developed a cyclical system of response. This system now involves compiling work orders for a specific location and then responding to all the pending issues at that location. This newly developed system has proven more effective and cost efficient. If not for the stimulus provided by action learning, this system may never have come about.

A second example can be readily seen in the associate’s degree program of our hourly custodians. Since introducing action learning, I have noticed a great change in the attitudes of this group. At the first meeting, there was a feeling of hesitation. As time went on, however, the group has developed into a team and has begun thinking of ways to improve their working environment. Having the opportunity to



head the class of the associate's degree group in the "Dean for a Day" program, I was amazed to see how they were thinking "outside the box" on many initiatives.

Through action learning, we have begun to live the mission statement of Sodexo: "To create and offer services that contribute to a more pleasant way of life for people whenever and wherever they come together." There is now team spirit among all the groups as they work together to accomplish this goal. "Service spirit" is achieved when the groups' goal is met and the client receives a better product. Through the innovative initiatives being set forth, the "spirit of progress" is achieved.

The participants in the action learning program were heard and their ideas were put into practice. As a result, everyone's self worth and self-esteem have improved, both in professional as well as personal lives.

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**Louis A. Ricci** is a bachelor's of management degree graduate of Sodexo University, Providence Campus



*James Norberg, shakes hands with Dr. Eric Sandelands after he receives his bachelor degree.*

## **Learning and Teamwork Prevent Frustration** by James E. Norberg



**When you have a team that thinks and believes in the same purpose work becomes easier**

Someone once asked Henry Ford how he was so successful. His response was, “I surround myself with successful people.” When you have a team that thinks and believes in the same purpose, work becomes easier. One is able to share the workload and therefore have more tasks accomplished, no matter on what level of management. This is the most important fact that I have realized during my learning experience over the past year.

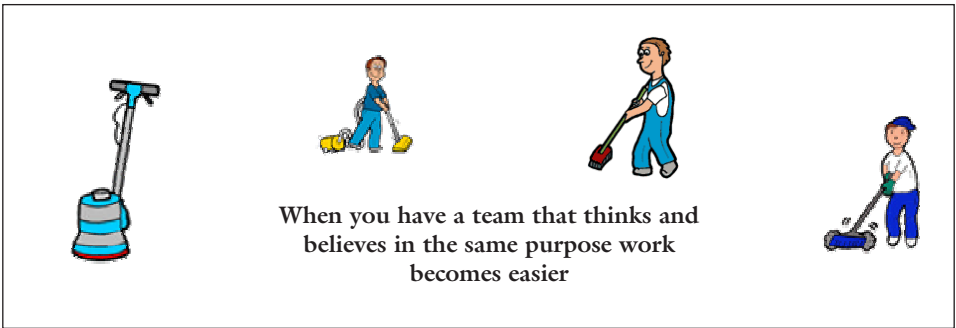
All major corporations recognize the importance of learning: teams involved in sports call it “practice” while individuals earning a degree call it “studying.” The most important point is that the best-of-the-best never get to the top without it. Why are some baseball teams on top while others are in last place? I see the same thing going on at Sodexho as I work with the Providence School Department. How can some schools be so far ahead of others in cleanliness? I feel that it is because the custodians in those schools are trained better. I also noticed that the lead custodians of these successful schools know this. That is why they were so uneasy about the reorganization Sodexho was about to undertake in February 2003 with their custodial departments. They wanted to make sure the custodians they lost from their teams would be replaced by others with the same successful cleaning techniques. That is why our action learning team recognized the need to ensure all Sodexho custodians were well trained.

Most successful managers and supervisors never go into a job thinking they will not succeed. However, even a positive mental attitude, a sense of pride in your job, and a winning spirit cannot help an individual accomplish the job alone. I realized I was going to need the help of my operational supervisor as well as the support of the other Sodexho University team members as we worked on the reorganization project. During our leadership project for the bachelor’s degree, my group realized this gap in training and developed a project utilizing our “best-of-the-best” lead

custodians in an action learning team. With only three operational supervisors handling approximately eighteen schools apiece, it is almost impossible to train everyone to the desired effectiveness. However, when we approached these leads and told them what we wanted to accomplish, we found that they wanted to help and were very excited about the opportunity.

We sent out questionnaires to all the schools, asking where they needed additional training. We selected four categories: classroom cleaning, restroom cleaning, stairwell cleaning and corridor cleaning. The results came back and were analyzed and broken down into charts for each of the schools. A training video was made with familiar faces that the custodians would easily recognize. Then, these lead custodians who had been selected went to several schools and started training the other custodians. After the training period was completed, we sent out individuals to document what improvements had taken place. We also interviewed the custodians who had been trained and the lead custodians who did the training. All individuals involved thought this type of training should be continued. Many of the people involved in this process wanted to be involved in future training projects. Additionally, overall cleaning in these schools went up 3%.

This training idea was not a mind-altering experience, nor was it probably the first time something like this was done by a company. It was, however, the first time we did something like this together and it worked. One can only climb a ladder one step at a time. When you have a team that thinks and believes in the same purpose, productivity increases and work becomes more enjoyable. One is able to work with a team of enthusiastic workers who work with, instead of against, managers to help accomplish tasks.



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**James E. Norberg** is a bachelor's of management degree graduate of Sodexo University, Providence Campus

## **Different Ways of Learning** by Michael Burgess



**With action learning we are allowed and encouraged to learn and communicate in many different ways**

Action learning has improved my training techniques and helped refine my communication skills. Before getting involved with Sodexo University, I was trained by both Marriott and Sodexo in a traditional classroom setting and, sometimes, by someone showing me on a one-on-one basis. However, growing up with dyslexia, I often had a difficult time grasping the concepts of what I was taught. As a result, I found what was being taught difficult. When it came to training or communicating with employees or co-workers, at best I just recycled what I was taught without actually absorbing or understanding it. With action learning, I am allowed and encouraged to learn and communicate in many different ways, and this has allowed me to understand and communicate more effectively.

I recently realized the impact of action learning when I was asked to help out on another account. When I arrived, I was faced with many obstacles that needed immediate attention. Some of the problems had to do with a lack of training, while others dealt with poor communication among co-workers. By learning the principles of the problem-solving approach, it was much easier to identify how each member learned, thus allowing me to teach to their strengths. Thus I was able to use a variety of teaching approaches – from walking someone step-by-step through a process to asking questions. This multiple approach to problem solving allowed them to discover the answer using their individual talents.

I learned through listening that management teams had a vast knowledge of different policies and procedures. The problem was that they did not grasp the ones specific to Sodexo. One day, I was able to solve this problem when I met with a group where the participants presented their task as a problem to be solved. They had to pretend that each was the General Manager and in three days they would receive a safety audit. I asked questions like: “Would your account pass this audit and if not what would you do to fix the problems?” I then left the group in the

office with instructions to figure it out with action learning. Within two hours, the group realized that they needed more training coupled with better communications to compete their task. Now we have another group of action learners working at Sodexo!

Because action learning has given me the opportunity to learn and teach in a way that is comfortable for me, it helps me understand that I can reach out to co-workers and employees in many different ways to achieve the goals of our clients and company.

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**Michael Burgess** is a bachelor's of management degree graduate of Sodexo University, Providence Campus

## **Action Learning Is Teamwork: The Doctoral Experience by Wayne Montague**



**Action learning has brought my school community together to help students succeed at high levels**

Through my experience of going through the doctoral program, I now understand that action learning is individuals working cooperatively together to improve their lives. Recently, I have worked with teachers, administrators, students, staff, parents, and community members to improve a local Middle School. The experience was unique because we worked as a team. Everyone brought different perspectives to the table as to what a “quality school” should look like, and everyone had a chance to share their own views, which were respected.

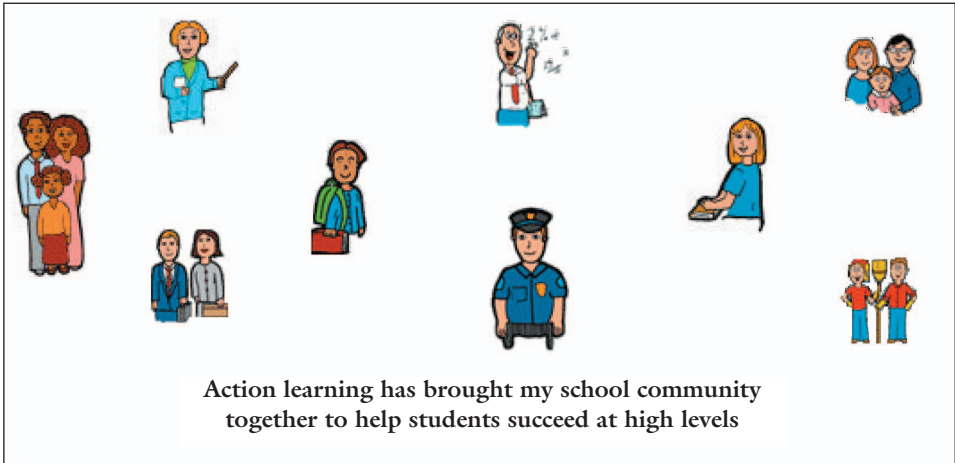
I found that action learning is really about participating and getting involved in meaningful causes. Through listening, researching, observing and participating with action learning teams I have discovered key strategies to help me grow and prosper as an individual and to help others succeed. The key strategies I have learned are:

- Respect everyone. Everyone’s voice should be heard.
- Effort creates ability. If you work hard you can be successful.
- No one man or woman is an island. Everyone has to work together to raise a child (student).
- Caring and sharing. People have to open up their heart and share their knowledge.
- Everyone can be empowered. We are all leaders.
- We can learn from one another and still value our differences.
- Believe that we can all learn and learn at a high level.
- Trust one another. We are all accountable.

Action learning has helped all of us become lifelong learners, quality citizens and productive workers. I came away from this experience more knowledgeable about how people learn and how important it is to have people active in their own

learning. Once someone is truly engaged (invested) in the action learning process one can observe a correlation between knowledge gained and a rise in self-esteem. From this wonderful experience, I have observed people working together, learning together and making the world a better place for everyone.

I am a believer in action learning because I have seen the results. Action learning has brought my school community together to help students succeed at higher levels. The school is now planting seeds of hope through action learning because of Sodexho.



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Wayne Montague, D.M.G.T. is a doctoral graduate at the Global Doctoral Campus, and is a Sodexho client

## Overcoming Fears by Susan Brown



**Thanks to action learning I'm facing my fears and turning them into a resource**

Action learning has challenged me and helped me grow in many ways. One way it has helped me is with my fear of public speaking. At meetings and trainings, I used to just sit back and let everyone else do the talking. After the meetings were over, I would berate myself for not giving any input or offering my ideas. When I started working on my degree, I did not count on doing any public speaking. My third output, however, turned out to be on internal communications.

At one point in the degree program, I had to put a PowerPoint presentation together and present it at one of our regular managers' meetings. I went to Richard, our team leader, and told him that I did not think I could do it and tried to put it off to the following week. He helped calm me down and have confidence that I could go ahead with it that day. I was a wreck, but I got through it. Even though it may not have been the best presentation, I learned a lot about myself from doing it; I also received a lot of great input from everyone. We spoke about how communication is important for client retention, which not only involves the customer, but also other employees. Feedback from co-workers is just as essential in keeping clients satisfied. We also discussed confidentiality, or the importance of building a trust between employees and management. I found a great quote in the EBSCO library, "Too many bosses, managers and/or service personnel are encountered discussing things within earshot of the wrong people. These conversations are totally inappropriate for the setting. Therefore, they hurt instead of help employee morale and/or customer relations." I am working on compiling information I have gathered from everyone at the meetings and using it to help all of us better to understand where we need to make some changes.

We speak about the issues we face everyday and say we need to change, and I think it is now time to put some solutions into effect. If I had not gotten into the action learning program I do not think I would ever have taken that first step to talk about



any of the changes that I see need to be made. It has also allowed me to see that my input is needed and is important to our progress. Like most people, I do not much like writing, but since I have been in the program I do a lot more of it and am learning to be less critical of myself now that I let someone else review my work. Thanks to action learning I am facing my fears and turning them into a resource tool.

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**Susan Brown** is a bachelor's of management degree graduate of Sodexho University, Providence Campus

## **Communicating with Respect** **by Ivonne Aleman**



**I think that respecting the opinions of everyone on the team is the foundation upon which a group works**

I am a lead custodian at one of the local elementary schools within the Providence School District. As a lead custodian, I am paired to work with people from all walks of life and from all job capacities, including principals, faculty, teachers, teachers' assistants, and other custodians, as well as with Sodexho management itself. The most important part of my job is being a good example to everyone. I must constantly keep the desires of clients and other co-workers in mind as I maintain a clean and safe school for the children.

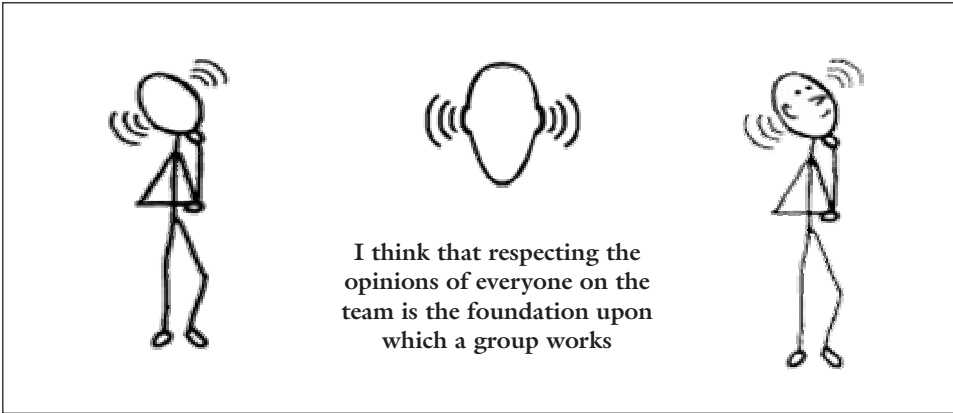
This year, I have had the opportunity to work with other custodians from various schools. The seven of us are currently enrolled in the action learning degree program as a set of associate's degree candidates. I now realize that, even though we all may come from different schools, we have many common problems. This was, in fact, the point of the program: to look for solutions to problems we are facing and work collectively to solve these problems.

We all found unity and support amongst the group. However, we had our fair share of obstacles. Not everything went as we had hoped or planned, but we always learned from these bumps in the road. I have learned that respecting the opinions of everyone in the team is the foundation upon which a group works. The following are a few suggestions that hopefully will help future degree candidates get through the tough times:

- The Golden Rule – treat others how you would like to be treated. Someone who is mistreated is not likely to function well with the rest of the group. This does not help the team solve problems.
- Listen to both sides of the story. When an individual listens, others feel like part of the team. They will reciprocate and express themselves in a positive manner.

- Saying “yes” conditionally is better than saying “no.” Be flexible; listen to suggestions – everyone’s ideas are important. Be open to all ideas and outcomes will be strengthened as a result. Debate about important points, not every point.

These are just a few suggestions for future students. I hope they help other teams become as successful, or even more so, as our team. Good luck!



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**Ivonne Aleman** is an associate’s degree graduate of Sodexho University, Providence Campus

## **The Benefits of Action Learning!** **by Miosotis Alsina**



**Everything learned is based on how you perform while working in a professional field**

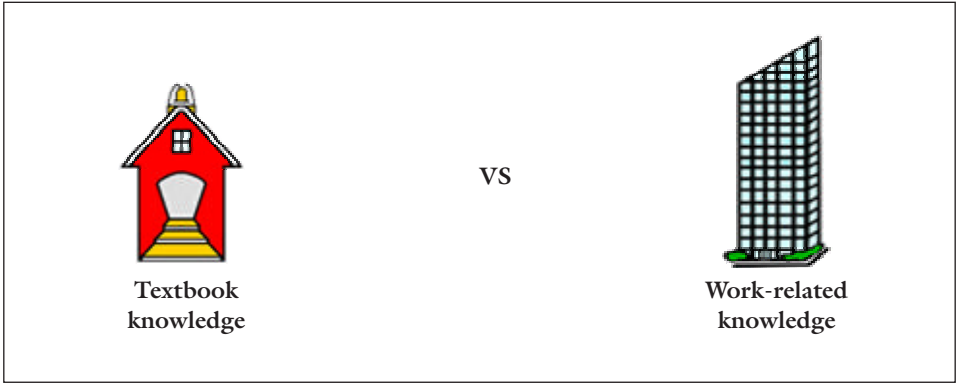
As a traditional learner and student, I have always considered my textbook to be my best friend for any particular subject. However, in my personal and professional day-to-day life, the action learning process has created a whole new curriculum of learning.

For my fourth output, I took notice of lots of students and leaders different views on what action learning means to them. During my search I also found that everyone has similar explanations when asked how they feel about action learning as opposed to traditional learning. Action learning is more like a vocational program. I have learned to put textbook knowledge into practice (hands-on) while continuing to learn, and, so far, this has been the best way for me to achieve success in the field. Sodexho University is a learn-at-work approach that teaches methods of learning rather than straight-line knowledge. Everything learned is tied to performance within a professional field. Additionally, action learning helps one build up personal confidence.

Sodexho University has shown me that action learning is the most effective way to learn while working. It has also taught me that you do not have to be Einstein to be able to learn and accomplish an educational goal.

I am thankful for the opportunity to participate in a program like Sodexho University. The following points are testimonies from the surveys I have gathered:

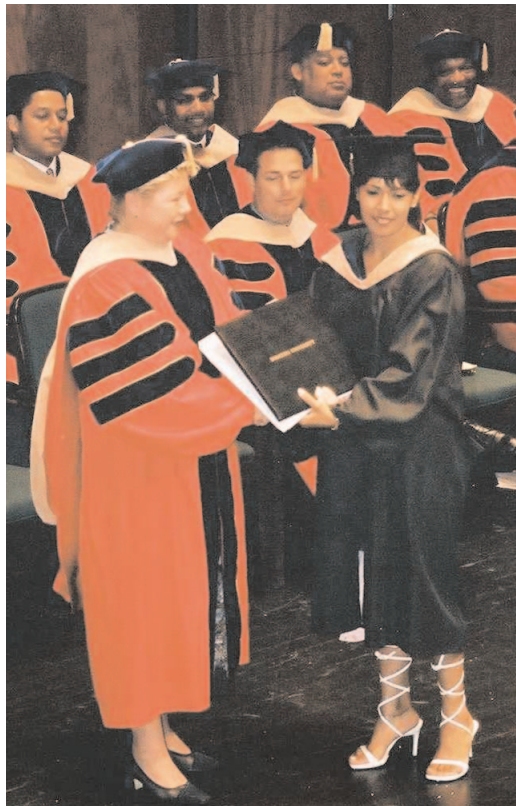
- The program is a great professional opportunity; action learning is a good morale booster and gives us the chance to move up!
- Action learning is an opportunity to advance, achieve and solve problems that may arise at work while also teaching how to overcome obstacles and, most importantly, learn how to work in groups instead of resolving work-related problems alone.



- To know that everyone from managers to union members are working together to achieve professional and personal growth is self-enriching. By seeing the “big picture” and working together, we can all obtain excellent results
- It is fantastic to know that Sodexo University offers these degrees without having to go to a formal classroom (traditional school). Action learning has served as motivation to develop my outputs.
- I have learned how a private business runs as opposed to governmental-type bureaucracy.
- Sodexo University is ahead of the game as far as matching up with other universities across the country goes because it recognizes students’ needs by allowing them to discover the best way to learn how to achieve the business goals and objectives.

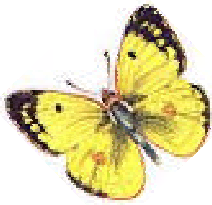
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**Miosotis Alsina** is a bachelor’s of management degree graduate of Sodexo University, Providence Campus



*Miosotis Alsina receives her bachelor degree from Provost.*

## **Action Learning: A View from Within** by Gloria C. Fiorucci



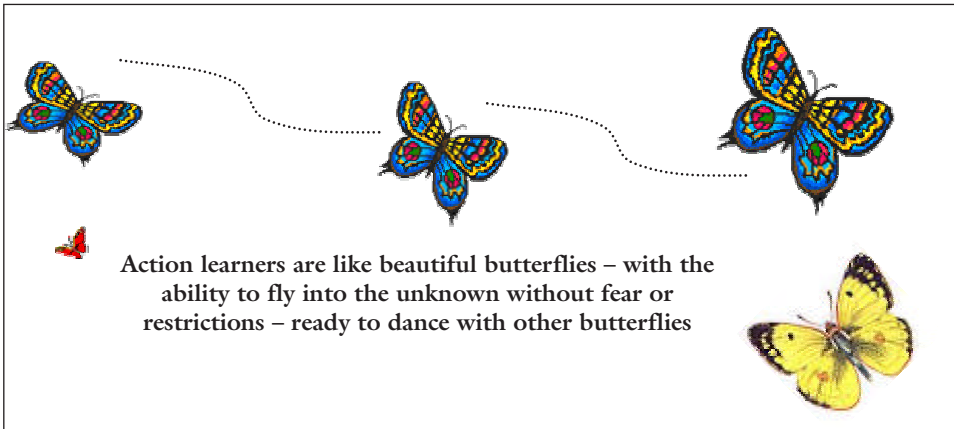
**Action learners are like beautiful butterflies – with the ability to fly into the unknown without fear or restrictions – ready to dance with other butterflies**

When action learning was first introduced to the Newark office, it was met with skepticism. After the presentation, everyone looked at each other and thought, “Here was another ‘feel good’ program that was going to change how everyone related and communicated – right?” The presenters had a tough crowd to try and reach with their positive message of action learning – everyone is responsible for their own learning, the problems we are solving are not always the right problems, and answers to problems should come from the team, not management. Though the group was skeptical, everyone agreed to give action learning a try.

Joining was the easy part – all we had to do was sign up. Letting go of ingrained, bad habits of how to deal with problems and management was not so easy. The two projects I participated in showed me how far we have come, yet also how far we still have to go. The lessons learned have not been easy and have sometimes been slow to adopt, but growth has still come from the action learning process. Both personal and team growth have occurred, which is no small feat in today’s society where everyone just wants to go with the flow, look the other way when problems come up, and not become personally involved.

The first project we tackled was an instant success as the problem was easily identified and resolved. The main obstacles we encountered were in how we worked as a team. We had a tendency to lose focus and digress; therefore, it took awhile to make decisions and come up with ideas and resolutions. A bigger issue was how we allowed the “strongest” personality to take over and direct where we were going. Even with these problems, one interesting lesson emerged for all of us: when we started to lose motivation, someone from the team took the initiative and got us rolling again. In this team environment, the ball did not get dropped and forgotten.

In the second project, it was interesting to watch how action learning kicked us into gear and really showed us how much learning we needed. The problem we thought



we needed to solve turned out not to be the “true problem,” and the team initially became discouraged. Lesson learned: When a team is discouraged, take a look at what is wrong with the assigned project and fix it – find the real problem. Discouragement can be a sign that a group is working on the wrong problem – recognize this in a timely manner and regroup before all interest in the project is lost.

When the team finally reconvened, we were able to take a fresh look at the project and change direction. In the beginning, our team could not shake prior bad habits and function without a leader. The team needed someone to provide direction, keep everyone focused, ensure deadlines were met, and coordinate the end result. In order to overcome this, we broke the project down into smaller pieces and assigned everyone a section. Lesson learned: Do not wait for someone else to start the ball rolling. It only takes one person to generate some excitement and motivate people. Action learning cannot ensure that the team is functioning well. Someone may have to take on the leadership role and then be willing to step back when the team is ready. At this point, we were still not 100% in action learning mode. Action learning alone could not make us feel engaged in the process. Though it only took one person to motivate the team, there were still concerns that people were going to drop out, and skepticism as to whether everyone would do their part in a timely manner. Trust within the team was slow in developing as people needed to feel they had something personal to gain before the project could really start moving. Lesson learned: When people feel that something personal is at stake they are willing to give more.

As the project took shape and everyone started to feel pride in the accomplishments, I watched, awestruck, as the group really started to gel. Working in an action learning team allowed us to see each other differently. After working so closely together, a bond formed. Lesson learned: People who enjoy working together are more efficient and communicate more effectively.

The real challenge was at the end when we had to pull everything together. This required us to work together closely and everyone had to give-and-take. It was interesting to watch how the dynamics of the group changed. Lesson learned: At this point, we did not need a leader – everyone was participating and fulfilling their responsibilities. Once a group is motivated and excited about a project, the members generate wonderful ideas and are willing to step beyond prior comfort levels to ensure a successful project.

Once the project was finished, we began eagerly looking around for another challenge to overcome. Lesson learned: People love feeling successful. Additionally, success helps people feel motivated to take on other challenges and projects.

To me, action learning is like the life cycle of a butterfly. The team needs to evolve from the caterpillar stage, where people are working alone in a silo, to the chrysalis stage, where they are struggling to break free from the confines of a self-imposed cocoon, to the final metamorphosis, where they emerge into a beautiful butterfly with the ability to fly into the unknown without fear or restrictions – ready to dance with other butterflies.

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**Gloria C. Fiorucci** is a candidate for the bachelor's of management degree from Sodexo University, Newark Campus