

www.skullworks.com

The eternal questions are still with us: What are we here for? Where's it all going? What's the meaning of life? Why is Bruce Forsyth still on TV? I don't know, I just don't know. But occasionally I come across writers, thinkers or bloggers who I suspect are closer to the answers than I am. Fred Nickols is one such person.

According to Nickols's *resumé*, he is "a consultant, writer and executive-level manager whose career spans 20 years in the United States Navy and another 30 years in the private sector".

I first came across his work by following a link from another web site. As I began to review the articles and materials I found there, I was immediately struck by the pragmatic, easy to understand and innovative range of ideas I encountered.

The web site that hosts a lot of Nickols's writing is called 'Skullworks'. It's an apt title as virtually all of the material to be found here requires you to reflect, consider and think.

The web site is active, especially his blog site where fresh and new ideas appear regularly. A concept that caught my eye recently is the 'Goals Grid' displayed in the diagram below. As you can see, this simple box model is immediately accessible and understandable but the questions it raises and the answers it prompts are potentially invaluable.

The web site covers a large range of materials, divided down into sections:

- Blog posts
- Book reviews
- Communities of practice and KM
- Consulting
- General interest
- Organisational development
- Publications and permissions
- Solution engineering/problem solving
- Strategy
- Training and human performance
- Work and management.

The blog posts are worth following, for the ideas and concepts that the author both creates and makes reference to, but the other sections are full of useful ideas as well. One of my favourites is in the training and human performance



section. The article in question is called "The 'Whatchamacallit' Process" and gets straight to the issue of why we train people and whether we should be training people.

I have three different types of individual that I encounter on training events: 'political prisoners' (they don't know why they are there, they've 'been sent' – it's as though they're in some kind of Kafka novel); 'tourists' (a day's training is better than a day at work), and genuine 'explorers' (people who want to learn and use what they learn). Often, the two former groups originate from the fact that trainers too quickly assume the mantle of deliverer rather than analyst and gatekeeper.

The "Whatchamacallit" process, however, clearly defines what the responsibilities of the HR function are in deciding who should be receiving training and, as importantly, who shouldn't.

I've never met Fred Nickols but he's my kind of performance specialist, with a keen eye for what matters and what works. If more of us in the L&D community followed his advice, we'd have fewer problems. ■

www.skullworks.com



CHECK NET

In our series looking at the best of the web, **Garry Platt** highlights a blogger who may have some of the answers

Garry Platt is a training and development specialist at EEF Oakham at Barleythorpe, specialising in management development and trainer training. He can be contacted on +44 (0)7899 992901 or at gplatt@eef.org.uk