Reg Revans Speaks About Action Learning

A video program produced and presented by Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt

Reg Revans, born in 1907, died in January 2003. In this video program, he is introduced by Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt and interviewed by Denis Loaney and John Mahoney at the First World Congress on Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management in Brisbane, 1990, at the age of 83. He discusses the following points:

- **L=P+Q** (Learning = Programmed knowledge + Questioning insight).

- Expert knowledge is necessary but not sufficient.

- True learning takes place through the exchange of ideas.

- We learn from talking about things that are **not** going well with our work.

- How do I ask myself fresh questions? The first emphasis is on what it is I don't know. Revans quotes Rutherford: “What impresses me most is my ignorance. What does yours look like to you?”

- Revans quotes Newton: “From time to time I was like a little boy on a beach picking up a shell...giving it some attention, but before me was the whole ocean of my ignorance.”

- Collaborative learning is about getting together to explore the beach, learning with and from others in the same mess. (Comrades in adversity)

- Action Learning is about people taking charge of their learning; experienced people discussing here and now problems; people who carry the final responsibility and bringing their values, motivation and experiences to the task.

- Action learning does not have a definite structure. It cannot be imprisoned. There is a wide range of action learning applications.

- Action learning is about behaviour. If you have immediate personal responsibility, you need never to pretend to be someone you are not. Revans asks a group of top managers to tell him the most important question that they have learned to ask themselves. He chooses this question: “What is an honest man and what need I do to become one?” Quoting the bible: “What is the Kingdom of Heaven?...The Kingdom of Heaven is within you.” Revans notes “You also have to ask yourself a few questions. Ask who you are.” This, to Revans, is the final value of action learning.