

Practicing what she preaches

Barbara Prashnig, author and pioneer in the world of accelerated learning techniques and individual working styles, has used her own methodologies to save her marriage. MARSHAR KAYE reports.

Four years ago Austrian-born educator Barbara Prashnig had given up on her marriage. Separated from her husband of 12 years, she busied herself with introducing revolutionary learning and working techniques to New Zealand schools and workplaces.

But her pioneering work — devising programmes which combine accelerated learning techniques, individual learning styles and her own wide experience in teaching — has benefited her more than she expected.

The techniques, adopted enthusiastically by local schools and businesses eager to enhance learning in pupils and employees, have given Prashnig the key to saving her marriage.

After 18 months of separation, Prashnig and her husband sat down one evening and filled out questionnaires developed at her Auckland-based Creative Learning Company. The simple tests were then analysed by a computer software program, which showed the couple's preferred working styles and, more importantly for the sake of the marriage, their differences. Understanding these diversities, and then applying techniques to address them, enabled the Prashnigs to save the marriage.

"Human diversity is at the centre of my work into learning styles. Unless you know what style of learning or working your employees or students have, you cannot teach them anything because they will simply switch off," claims Prashnig.

And, as Prashnig demonstrated with her own marriage, understanding yourself and the differences in others is as useful for fixing problematic relationships at home as it is in the workplace.

Meeting Prashnig to interview her about her first book, *Diversity Is Our Strength: The Learning Revolution In Action*, it's hard to imagine such a cheerful person could experience problems of any description. She's a youthful 46-year-old, who's loads of fun and has an enthusiasm for her work that is quite infectious.

Her insights into personal learning and working styles have gained popularity around the world. The new 200-page book, launched by Auckland's Profile Publishing last month, is released in several countries and includes a Swedish version.

It is designed as an easy-to-read workbook for business managers, schoolteachers and students. The layout based on the concept of Suggestopedia, which Prashnig has studied in the United States with accelerated learning expert Georgi Lozanov assists speed-reading. The right-hand pages have narrow columns of text and accompanying cue words in the margin while the left-hand pages display graphics and exercises.

Prashnig taught for 17 years in Europe before immigrating to New Zealand in 1985 to take up a teaching post in the Linguistics Department at the University of Auckland. Five years later she quit the academic world to set up the Creative Learning Company.

Her research has enabled her to create highly regarded learning programmes like Working Style Analysis (WSA), which she and her husband used for understanding their own relationship. WSA is tailored for the education field as well as for the workplace, enabling managers to understand their personal working styles and those of their employees. Both managers and staff complete WSA questionnaires and have them evaluated by especially designed software.

"WSA is about knowing your personal working style and that of other people," says Prashnig. "Managers can find out the kind of environment their employees work best in, for example the light levels and temperatures they require. Or whether employees are the analytical left brain thinkers or the more creative right brain thinkers."

WSA also determines which time of day or evening a person is at their most productive.

"I have worked with many companies who have a sales meeting at 9am every Monday morning because the manager is an early morning person", she says. "The manager thinks this is the best time to have a meeting because everyone will be as fresh as he is and doesn't realise half of the group are brain dead until 11am."

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