

Tips Learned During the Instructor Development Academy

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I had the opportunity to attend a four-day Instructor Development Academy presented by Penn State University in State College, Pennsylvania. Four modules were the foundation of the academy: Module 1 - An Overview of Instruction, Module 2 – The Start of Instruction, Module 3 – Instructional Methods and Course Delivery, and Module 4 – Program Evaluation. Near the conclusion of the training, each participant presented a mini-training, was videotaped, and received feedback from the group and facilitators based on the information presented the previous three days. The objective of building skills in designing and presenting productive, relevant trainings with adult learner characteristics in mind was well met. The Academy was extremely informative and comprehensive and the information that was taught was demonstrated in the design and presentation of the training.

Module 1 discussed the importance of being a facilitator versus being a teacher and how and why this differentiation is relevant. A facilitator will quickly establish the WIIFM (What's in it for me) relevance to the audience and make it clear to the participants what the training objectives are. (Throughout this article, the terms instructor, presenter, and facilitator will be interchangeable in the hopes that all will have similar characteristics.) A strong, effective facilitator will maintain a positive learning environment by addressing the expectations of the adult learners, providing a sense of direction with clearly defined training objectives, using the audience's previous knowledge, and making the training applicable to the real world. These combined elements will facilitate the transfer of learning for the adult learner.

The idea of a facilitator easing the transfer of learning and providing the learners with the information needed to allow themselves to grow is a very adaptive approach to learning. Past educational experiences have taught many that a learning environment consists of a teacher or trainer standing in front of a group and lecturing. This approach allows for very little interaction and addresses few learning styles. Learning more about adult learner characteristics clarifies why the lecturing style is not very successful with many adult learners, hence the differentiation between facilitator and teacher.

A facilitator will create a positive learning environment by keeping the four stages of learning in mind - participation, reflection, structure, and experimentation. A well-designed training will provide the time and means for all learner types to perform each of these steps. The design and presentation of a training should acknowledge and address the learning styles, needs, and preferences of each individual learner.

An audience analysis sent out prior to the training or made a part of the registration process will provide useful data on the group. The information gathered will provide information on various personal traits: age and maturity, personal goals, level of self-confidence, experience in the subject area, educational level, job position, learning style, cultural background, and interpersonal style. The facilitator will then be able to design the training with these characteristics in mind.

A training should be learner-centered, not trainer- or topic-centered. For a strong, effective training, the facilitator needs to choose activities that clearly relate to the stated training objectives, make environmental adaptations (if needed), remain flexible, and answer individual learning questions.

The audience's initial impression of the instructor sets the tone for the rest of the training. A training will only be as good as the instructor. The facilitator's knowledge of and experience with the topic, knowledge of training and learning styles, and familiarity of learners' profiles all affect his/her credibility. Once the facilitator establishes credibility, the audience will more easily accept the information presented which will in turn ease the transfer of learning.

An obvious, yet often neglected, aspect of training is, simply, communication. Effective communication is an ongoing, multi-directional process with five specific steps. During these steps it is easy to see why there are numerous opportunities for miscommunication. When a message goes through the process of being created, encoded, transmitted, received, and decoded numerous opportunities for misinterpretation exist. Facilitators benefit from knowing that seven percent of a message is received through language (words, structure, and pattern), fifty-five percent is received through paralanguage (tone of voice, inflection, volume, rate of speech, etc.), and forty-eight percent of the message is received through body language (physical appearance, posture, gestures, distance, body movements or position, etc.).

In order to ascertain that the message is correctly received, various techniques can be applied. An oral or written test can be given, the audience can be asked to restate important points or demonstrate skills, a field study can be conducted, questions can be asked, or the audience can teach the material back to the group. Properly received messages indicate progress toward the defined training objectives.

As stated earlier, an adult audience is more likely to value information presented by a trusted and credible trainer. An introduction that addresses the instructor's background and experience will help to establish this rapport. The introduction is also a good time to review the agenda, discuss the purpose and objectives of the training and the expectations of the group, establish the WIIFM, relay housekeeping issues, and explain how questions will be handled. A training will suffer if preparation and practice of the introduction are underestimated. Remember, first impressions are lasting and hard to change.

Successful adult learning begins with a credible facilitator who has knowledge of adult learner characteristics and designs and presents a training around these traits. A strong introduction paves the way towards a productive learning environment where proactive steps to avoid miscommunication will minimize lack of progress towards the established training objectives.

The start of instruction is the focus of Module 2. An acronym that applies to this phase is ADDIE - **a**nalyze, **d**esign, **d**evelop, **i**mplement, and **e**valuate. The analyzing will be done with the audience questionnaire; the design, development, and implementation are ongoing processes that consider adult learner characteristics and styles. Evaluation,

another ongoing process, determines the success of the training and provides direction for future modifications.

A key element in any training is acquiring and maintaining the audience's attention, which leads in to their motivation. Attention-getting opening statements provide an opportunity to draw the learners in and set their role for the remainder of the training. Adult learners will benefit most from an active, interactive learning environment. This interaction involves creating a partnership between the learners and the instructor; considering individual motivation, experience, and communication skills sets the stage for each learner to relax and allow the intake of knowledge.

A skillful facilitator knows the importance of establishing this respectful partnership with each learner. Motivation develops when the instructor honors the audience's individualities, learns their needs and expectations, validates their input, actively listens, shows excitement about the material and its relevance, demonstrates confidence in the learners, and follows established time lines.

Practicing these tactics will not eliminate the need to consider barriers to learning during all aspects of a training. These barriers may be physical or personal, real or perceived, and controllable or uncontrollable. The goal is to minimize as many barriers as possible and make adaptations to work with any fixed barriers. By doing do, another step is taken towards creating a desirable learning environment.

There are numerous ways to maintain this desirable environment - the use of icebreakers and opening exercises being one of them. Icebreakers are brief group exercises typically used at the beginning of a training and are designed to make introductions, to help participants feel more comfortable, and to possibly lead into a theme of the training. Opening exercises maintain comfortable, ongoing participation, and may be used throughout the training as a transition between topics, to evaluate effectiveness of the training, and to create team building.

Pulling together all of the information presented thus far contributes to the design of a training. When devising an outline for the session consider AIMS - attention, intent, message, and summary. Acquiring and maintaining the audience's attention prepares them for the communication of the message and then a summary of the session pulls all the material together.

The intent of a training becomes obvious when clear, concise goals and objectives are created. When designing a training, it is valuable to know what the learners are to be able to do at the end of the training. This training objective will aid in the selection of instructional materials and content, the evaluation of the success of the instruction, and will act as a framework for participants to mark their progress.

The desired result of a training is to create a behavior change that the learner retains after the session. A thorough, effective design process will minimize confusion of the learners, stress the relevance of the material, actively engage the learners using a multi-sensory approach, start where the learners are, stay learner-centered, and make immediate real-life application of skills possible and desirable.

Retention of presented material is most certainly a desired result of a training and if learners understand that repetition significantly increases learning and retention they will recognize the need for practice. The training design should allow for practice and repetition of the learned material so that questions that arise during application can be immediately answered. Another excellent way to increase retention is for the learners to articulate what they are learning - the more someone talks about what they are learning, the better they learn it. Retention of material can also be increased by asking questions such as "What was most valuable about that exercise or section?" or "What have you learned that you are going to take with you and be able to apply?"

The answers to these questions will indicate both group and individual progress toward the training objective(s). The facilitator will be able to provide individual feedback, which should include precise, detailed examples of a behavior (not a person) so that the information will be truthful, supportive, and well received.

Questions are a very valuable tool when facilitating a training. They can be used as an introduction to or transition between materials, an assessment of effectiveness of the training, a way to generate interest, and a way to involve and manage the audience. A rhetorical question may be used during an introduction to gain attention and provoke interest while an overhead question (which is similar to a rhetorical one except that an answer is expected) can be asked to the general audience. Directed questions are aimed towards a specific person or group and are used to involve someone. When responding to questions, use of one of these tactics is helpful: asking a reflective question of the original questioner or, re-directing a question to the entire group or to a specific individual. When answering a question, a good facilitator will always respond with "Good question, I'm glad you asked that." Validating adult learners is very important; encouraging questions will increase learner comfort and involvement.

Thorough training design will analyze, design, develop, implement, and evaluate (ADDIE) while considering attention, intent, message, and summary (AIMS). Clear training objectives that state a desired behavior change will provide a concrete framework in which the training can occur. The facilitator will create a partnership with the audience to enhance the positive learning environment.

The third Module of the Academy delved into instructional methods and course delivery. Tips for dealing with facilitator nervousness (including preparation, deep breathing, moderation of caffeine intake, and positive self-talk are mentioned), then specific methods of instruction are discussed. Detail of these various techniques is given, as are guidelines for using instructional media.

While some nervousness may be beneficial, an overdose does no one any good. To limit shaky knees, prepare and rehearse the training frequently, focus on something other than the nervousness, take a brisk walk before starting, practice deep breathing and positive self-talk, and refrain from announcing your nervousness to the group.

As a facilitator there are many choices when determining what method(s) of instruction to use. Options include lectures, discussion or question and answer sessions, small group activities, role-playing, examination of case studies, participation in simulations or games,

and demonstrations. Optimizing the learning environment involves keeping several things in mind:

- 📖 How to best match the content to the learners' needs
- 📖 How to recognize and adapt to the environmental limitations
- 📖 How to use varying techniques and activities to reach multiple learning styles
- 📖 How to clearly link activities to the training objectives
- 📖 How to maintain flexibility to meet the needs of the diverse audience

Occasionally disruptive learners are part of the diverse audience: there are usually two types of challenging participants. These learners are either having difficulty with the learning because they a) want to learn but are having trouble with the material or the delivery style or b) don't want to learn. Regardless of the type of demanding learner the facilitator should do his/her best to listen openly to the participant's problems or issues, address the problems, and, when necessary, talk to the agitator during a break and address his/her disruptive behavior.

Being alert to challenging participants is important when considering the use of small groups or team exercises. When organizing small groups the control of the training shifts from the instructor to the group(s). Provide clear directions and expectations (preferably written,) be aware of learners' comfort level, be attentive to the stages of "team development", supervise group dynamics and processes, intervene when and where appropriate, provide positive and corrective feedback, allow participants sufficient time to complete the exercise, bring closure to the group activity, tie the exercise back to the module content, and smoothly and clearly transition from group work to the next delivery method.

Transitioning between content areas can be done around breaks - this helps with major subject shifts. Minor transitions can be made by doing a quick summary using visual aids, referring to the agenda, facilitating a small group discussion that culminates in the sharing of three key ideas, asking "How does this relate to what has already been covered?", initiating physical movement, and using or changing media.

When designing a training there are some basic things to consider in order to use instructional media and technology effectively. Be completely familiar with the visual aids, the equipment, and their use. For maximum effectiveness use minimal visual aids and position them for optimal viewing for everyone. Prior to the start of training, ascertain that all equipment is in working order. Maintain control of the training; do not allow the visuals to dictate the presentation. Remember that different types of visual aids work with different types of learners and should be used accordingly.

Prior to the training the instructional site must be prepared. Environmental properties to consider include - physical comfort, room temperature, lighting, noise, formality, structure, safety (whether perceived or real), and time of day. Arrive early in order to confirm that the classroom is designed and equipped appropriately, the seating arrangement is effective, the equipment is functioning properly, and housekeeping details are known.

The facilitator has a large repertoire of instructional methods and course delivery styles at his/her disposal. Despite the choices made, the possibility of encountering disruptive

learners always exists. This can add a layer of difficulty to small group activities or team exercises making it important to be prepared to transition to different methods or styles. Arriving early allows the facilitator time to survey the environmental circumstances, test equipment, and confirm housekeeping details.

The final module of the Academy focused on program evaluation, for both the course and the learner. A major outcome of evaluation is to assess the effectiveness of the program by comparing the results to the established training objectives. Further training needs can be determined and improvements can be made to the training based on the outcomes of the assessments.

Evaluation of learner performance can be done before, during, and after the training by asking questions, making observations, monitoring discussions, observing skill practice sessions, administering written or oral tests, and having learners perform self-assessments. There are four levels of learner evaluation that can be monitored: reaction to the training, information acquisition, behavior change, and impact of the training.

The audience can do facilitator and training assessments during and after the session. Answers to the following questions will provide information on the performance of the instructor.

- 📖 Where learning objectives clearly stated and reached?
- 📖 Did the instructor demonstrate strong content knowledge?
- 📖 Was the classroom environment suitable?
- 📖 Were activities used appropriately?
- 📖 Was effective technology used?

Traditionally the participants are given an evaluation form to complete at the end of the training. The wording of the assessment can gather information on the learners' gains and the instructor's effectiveness. Surveys can be mailed out after a training to test real-life application of materials and/or field tests can be done.

Ongoing and final assessments provide the instructor with valuable information to use when improving or adapting the training. Evaluation of the learners will indicate progress towards reaching the training objectives. Achieving objectives means successful training.

"What I hear, I forget.
What I see, I remember.
What I do, I understand." Confucius, 451 BC

Did you know that

Studies indicate that we retain:

- 📖 10% of what we read,
- 📖 20% of what we hear,
- 📖 30% of what we see,
- 📖 50% of what we hear and see,
- 📖 70% of what we say, and
- 📖 90% of what we say and do