

Tips for New Trainers



Are you new to talent development?

You are not alone. Most people who work as talent development professionals and trainers either transferred into the field or were promoted into the role. Many are still building their knowledge and skills of how adults learn and how to improve organizational performance.

The pace of change in the workforce requires constant upskilling and reskilling of employees. Organizations must be future focused and stay abreast of the trends shaping the business world. Developing new skills has never been more important. As a trainer or learning and development professional, your work is vital to organizational success.

According to the January 2016 issue of *TD at Work*, “trainers boost the skills and knowledge of others. Through instruction and practice, a trainer helps people:

- Gain new skills, knowledge, and behavior.
- Acquire proficiency and awareness of products, processes, and methods.
- Achieve a defined or perhaps higher performance standard.”

Facilitation

But is a trainer also a facilitator? According to the same January 2016 *TD at Work* issue, “Typically, we think of trainers as people who relay content, while facilitators focus on learning through a group process. Today, with myriad options available to learners, the lines have blurred, and a trainer often must act as a facilitator to transfer learning.”

To effectively facilitate knowledge transfer, a trainer should have a strong foundation in four key areas. They must be a good teacher of content and use various appropriate methods to help a broad audience:

- Learning theory
- Training methods
- Presentation and facilitation
- Evaluation

Through instruction and practice, a trainer helps people:

- Gain new skills, knowledge, and behavior.
- Acquire proficiency and awareness of products, processes, and methods.
- Achieve a defined or perhaps higher performance standard.

“Facilitation is the act of adjusting delivery and curriculum to adapt to the audience and the needs of the learners,” according to the ATD book *10 Steps to Successful Training*. “An excellent trainer finds ways to involve participants in learning new skills and knowledge.”

When asked what they wanted most in a trainer or facilitator, participants stated these characteristics:

- Competence: Someone who demonstrates knowledge of the topic.
- Organization: Someone who delivers an organized presentation and who maintains organization throughout the seminar.
- Captivating delivery: Facilitator who grabs and holds participants’ attention.
- Relevance: Facilitator who demonstrates practical applications and uses relevant examples.
- Responsiveness: Someone who answers questions and addresses individual needs.
- Enthusiasm: Facilitator who is genuinely excited and interested in the participants and in what is being taught.
- Participant focus: Someone who involves the audience and encourages participation.
- Humor: Someone who uses humor to enhance learning and isn’t too serious.

Facilitation just doesn’t happen. It takes practice. When preparing for any learning session, remember that all learners are different. Your job is to keep your audience engaged, create a nurturing learning environment, and find ways to help people learn and change behaviors.

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Tips for New Trainers

By Nancy Germond

First day on the job? Here's some advice for success, from trainers who have been there.

New trainers face daunting challenges. Whether your boss promotes you into a training position or you are hired from another organization, you want to start off strong. In part, that means avoiding mistakes commonly made by new trainers.

Although we often learn our best lessons when we stumble, some mistakes can seriously hurt your training program, damage your reputation, or even derail your career. Here are 10 tips to help you get your training career off on the right foot.

Complete a thorough needs assessment.

Whether you use a formal interview process, a job-analysis approach, or you simply host informal talks with supervisors, needs assessment is critical to training success. "The biggest mistake I made as a new trainer and instructional designer was not taking enough time to understand my participants' needs," says Susan Michels-Ricker, a systems developer and project analyst at Federated Insurance Company.

Managers often will suggest a solution to the wrong problem. "We need training on X," supervisors may say, when in fact the problem is Y. During your needs assessment, talk with a few of the people you'll be training to see what they think of the proposed solution.

If you find that managers disagree with end users, you must diplomatically discuss how to reposition the training to fill the actual learning gap. With today's tight budgets, you simply cannot afford to spend resources on the wrong problem.

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Don't answer every question.

You may have gone from a role as a subject matter expert to a trainer. However, many of the employees you will train also have a reservoir of applicable experience and knowledge. When possible, draw from the participants' combined knowledge instead of always answering questions.

Also, allow "dead space" or silence, which provides participants a chance to contribute. Keep in mind that many people feel uncomfortable speaking up in front of an entire classroom, so design small-group activities that allow learners to collaborate as they solve problems. Let your learners work and interact; otherwise, you will lose their interest.

Vary your training delivery methods.

Games, simulations, social learning—there is an overwhelming number of ways to approach classroom training. It can be tempting to resort to the traditional PowerPoint-aided lecture. But be careful not to turn the lecture into an information dump. This presentation style rarely results in participants putting their learning into practice.

One way to increase interest in your presentation is to incorporate a case study. Ideally, this is a compelling story of how the training material is applied in a real-life scenario. You also can solicit examples from trainees that reinforce the concepts they're learning.

Develop a tool to ensure managers reinforce learning.

Studies show that most learning takes place after the training event, when managers actively reinforce a course's learning objectives. Since most managers won't take the course themselves, offer them a management tool that outlines the learning objectives and lists action items under each of the course's objectives.

For example, if you're teaching a new technology to call-center employees, the management tool should be a checklist of the key principles and the action items associated with them that you taught the class to apply in their day-to-day work.

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Slow down.

Often, we plug too much material into a presentation, forcing us to rush through it. “One of the most common mistakes I see with new trainers who are experts in the material is covering the material too quickly and expecting the class to keep up,” says Micah Bean, a training manager at Answer Financial. “I remember ‘bulldozing’ right through my material because it was so easy for me. I have since learned to slow down and read the room to ensure everyone is with me.”

Don’t pack too much information into a single training event. It overwhelms participants and they often walk away with no clear vision of how to implement what they learned.

Check the room and double-check your equipment.

You’d be surprised how often trainers arrive too late. Show up early enough to ensure that you are comfortable with the room setup and that your equipment is working. Then, work the room—greeting trainees and building rapport with them.

Use humor appropriately.

“Focus humor toward yourself, not toward your trainees,” recommends Steve Price, a performance consultant in Phoenix, Arizona. “It takes only one person feeling offended to get you an appointment with your human resources representative.”

Although we are flooded with off-color humor in our lives, we cannot afford to use humor in the workplace that might invite complaints. When using images and anecdotes in your presentation, steer away from photos and stories that can cause controversy.

Use images instead of text whenever you can.

In the book *Talk Like Ted*, Carmine Gallo recaps the evidence that shows we remember images much more readily than words. Three days later, people remember only about 10 percent of what they hear, according to Gallo. Pictures increase recall to an amazing 65 percent, proving that we can greatly increase learning if we use fewer bullet points and more relevant images.

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Take time to rehearse.

We spend weeks, sometimes months, designing the perfect curriculum. Then we fail to practice it. Training professionals need to master the presentation. This enables us to stay on track after participants ask questions or sidetrack us.

“The most common mistake I see for beginning trainers... is that they don’t work hard enough preparing,” says Kevin Ring, founder of the Institute of Benefits and Wellness Professionals. “I’ve seen people spend weeks prepping a slide deck, but never once rehearse the actual presentation.”

If things go wrong, do immediate damage control when class ends.

Sometimes training sessions stray off course, perhaps due to disruptive participants or some other issue. When this happens, face problems head-on before they come find you.

Go to your supervisor first so that he isn’t blindsided. If necessary, talk to both a trusted senior leader in your organization and your training peers. They can help you troubleshoot what went wrong and determine how to avoid that problem in the future.

Never underestimate the challenges of a new training position. These tips can help you make a smooth transition and continue to thrive in your new role.

Source: February 2015 *TD* magazine; Nancy Germond is owner of InsuranceWriter LLC, and provides training and development services to insurance professionals.

Resources

Biech, E., 2009. [10 Steps to Successful Training](#). Alexandria, VA; ASTD Press

ATD, 2016. [“Basic Training for Trainers.”](#) *TD at Work*. Alexandria, VA; ATD Press.

Germond, N. 2015. [“Off to a Good Start: Tips for New Trainers.”](#) *TD Magazine*. Alexandria VA; Association for Talent Development.

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Dos and Don'ts for the New Trainers

Here are some suggestions for you to be a successful trainer:

Dos

- Prepare, prepare, prepare.
- Make the objective clear.
- Make the session participatory.
- Review and stick to the agenda.
- Encourage questions.
- Have an opening and closing.
- Gear sessions toward learners' needs.
- Promote networking among participants.
- Use visuals or varied learning techniques.
- Survey the facility in advance.
- Dress professionally.
- Internally market the training program.
- Use transfer of training techniques.
- Evaluate.

Don'ts (and What to Do Instead)

- Start late. Instead, expect participants to be on time and start the session accordingly.
- Criticize or embarrass a participant. Instead, respect each of them.
- Hide behind the podium. Instead, circulate the room.
- Permit discussions to stray from the subject. Instead, bring the conversation to the topic of the training.

- Indulge in bad presentation habits. Instead, know your audience and the goal of your training and make your presentation engaging from start to finish.
- Overload learners. Instead, divide information into modules.
- Let your delivery overshadow the content. Instead, your top priority should be the participants' learning needs.
- Limit yourself to one method of delivery. Instead, incorporate small group discussions and role-play with lecture.
- Get stale. Instead, vary your routine.
- Pigeonhole yourself. Instead, stretch your talents.
- Go at it alone. Instead, ask experts for help.

Source: ATD, 2016. "Basic Training for Trainers." *TD at Work*. Alexandria, VA; ATD Press.

The Association for Talent Development

The Association for Talent Development (ATD) champions the importance of learning and training by setting standards for the talent development profession. ATD is the largest, most-trusted organization for the professional development of practitioners in training and talent development, serving a worldwide community with members in more than 100 countries.

Since ATD was founded in 1943, the talent development field has expanded significantly to meet the needs of global businesses and emerging industries. ATD's mission is to empower professionals to develop talent in the workplace.

For more information, visit td.org.