

FUNDAMENTALS

A New Habit for Trainers

Find your inner voice and help others find theirs.

By Stephen R. Covey

The object of any training session is to make a difference that matters. Ironically, a chronic problem that trainers face is relevance. It's often hard to tell how much, if any, difference you've made.

But relevance is rooted in a much deeper problem: The training paradigm is still too attached to the Industrial Age, which viewed people as interchangeable parts in the great enterprise machine. That kind of thinking treats participants like computers, and trainers like data entry personnel. Of course, some types of training—new technology, new office

skills—will always be instructional. But it's imperative that we don't continue to apply an outdated approach to teaching higher-order skills, such as decision making and problem solving.

The challenge for trainers is to banish the Industrial Age mindset and recognize that people are not things. They're enormously gifted individuals, each uniquely capable of contributing more than they are asked.

I've trained thousands of people, and, wherever I go, I ask this question: "How many believe that the majority of people

in your organization possess far more talent, intelligence, capability, and creativity than their present jobs require or even allow?" Almost every hand goes up.

Use your voice

To gain relevance in your next session, I suggest adopting what I call the *8th Habit*: Finding your voice and helping others find theirs.

Your "voice" comprises your unique gifts and powers. No one has the same talent, intelligence, and capabilities that you do. And the same is true of your participants. Too often, training is a narrow cookie-cutter experience that fails to capitalize on individual uniqueness. So to find your own voice and inspire others to find theirs, try applying these six fundamentals of the 8th Habit.

Clarity. Get crystal clear about outcomes and measures. From the start, ask participants to challenge the goals of the learning, rework them, and take ownership of them. Those goals must become *their* goals.

Ask participants to define their personal measures of success. How else will they know if their goals are achieved? Also, challenge them to make an explicit connection with the greater goals of the organization or team. Ask them to spell out that connection until they're satisfied that their learning serves a crucial purpose. If it can't be done, perhaps it's best to adjourn.

Commitment. The Industrial Age approach to getting commitment is "carrot-and-stick" motivation. Management sells benefit and predicts punishments. By contrast, the 8th Habit approach garners commitment by respecting the mind, heart, and spirit of the participant. While much of what I have suggested to establish clarity fosters commitment, more is required.

The trainer's task is to lead people to insight and inspire them. Carefully consider what key insights you want partici-

pants to gain and what paradigms must change. Discover what excites and inspires you about the training, and how that touches on a higher mission or deeper values. That's where real learning starts.

Translation. Translate commitment to action. Help participants align their own talents and passions to the task at hand. What unique contribution can they make?

Challenge them to individually define how their new understanding translates into new behavior. It's one thing to have new insights and new goals; it's quite another to act on them. Participants should leave your session with a clear idea what to do differently because of the training.

Facilitation. Help participants empower themselves by defining barriers to action. What external people, systems, policies, or processes stand in the way? Don't forget, they have internal obstacles too, such as their own paradigms, attitudes, or beliefs. Identify those barriers and devise strategies to surmount them.

Another facilitation method is to turn participants into teachers. When you teach a concept, ask them to teach it to one another, using their own voices. Their understanding and commitment will increase significantly. Try using triads: Ask one person to teach, another to learn, and another to observe and offer suggestions.

Synergy. The highest form of learning is synergistic, where diverse minds come together to create something new and unanticipated.

So, how do you arrive at synergy? First, value the different voices. Actively seek divergent viewpoints. If participants disagree with you, be delighted, not displeased. Say, "Good! You see it differently." Then listen, and insist that everyone else listens. You and your group will naturally arrive at better insights as a result.

Accountability. This is the great weakness in most training experiences—accountability doesn't count. It usually



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takes the form of a throwaway end-of-workshop evaluation form. Remember, if you don't take accountability seriously, who will take the training seriously?

Ask yourself, Is there any meaningful way for people to hold themselves and others accountable for this learning? Perhaps the groups could continue to meet and answer to each other for lessons learned as they apply the concepts. Or, try using a scoreboard to track progress over time.

Incorporating the 8th Habit into your teaching helps participants find their voices, learn insights, define goals, and become accountable for change. Training professionals who understand that are poised to help unleash the true potential of the human spirit.

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