

"HOW DO I, AS A TRAINER, INDIVIDUALIZE WHEN I HAVE PRESET LEARNING OBJECTIVES TO MEET OR A 'PACKAGED PROGRAM' TO PRESENT?"

# INDIVIDUALIZING LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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As trainers, we sooner or later come to the realization that one of the most critical factors in training practice is the fact that learning is an internal process.

Those methods, activities and techniques which involve the individual learner most deeply in self-directed inquiry will produce *internalization*, and the greatest learning. Related to this issue, Dr. Malcolm Knowles made the following comment:

*In fact, the main thrust of modern adult-educational technology is in the direction of inventing techniques for involving adults in ever-deeper processes of self-diagnosis of their own needs for continued learning, in formulating their own objectives for learning, in sharing responsibilities for designing and carrying out their learning activities, and in evaluating their progress toward their objectives.*<sup>1</sup>

However, the question that immediately arises is: "How do I, as a trainer, individualize when I have preset learning objectives to meet

or a 'packaged program' to present?"

To combine this need to present a specific concept with the need to individualize the training, I have developed and successfully implemented a learning design entitled, *The Individualizing Learning Objectives Instrument*.

The goal of this instrument is to aid the trainer and participants in the understanding of the learning objectives and the desired skills, which is necessary for a successful training event. In most cases, participants of a particular training event will have seen the preset objectives contained in the description of the training event. This instrument involves taking data, on site, from participants' own needs in order to find appropriate alternatives to what was planned prior to the training event.

This Individualizing Learning Objectives Instrument aids the trainer in the clarification of the goals for the training event, as well as in the identification of the specific learning needs of the participants. This instrument will also

aid the trainer in keeping participants moving in the direction of the desired learning and skills.

The implementation of this instrument affords the trainer and participants the opportunity to formulate a contractual agreement. Since a contract is a specific document which spells out, as completely as possible, the expected performance of each and every party, a contractual agreement on the specific objectives should keep the trainer from forging energetically forward — alone. Chances of a successful training event are usually considerably better when everyone contracts or agrees on intended outcomes. This activity permits the contract to occur.

A contractual agreement on specific objectives provides participants with the opportunity to contribute, from the start, to the training event, thereby giving them ownership and personal commitment; enabling them to have influence on the desired outcomes. Therefore, this contracting also enhances the training event with "motivators" which should increase involvement of the participants.

**Figure 1.**  
**WORKSHEET: INDIVIDUALIZING LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

Preset Learning Objectives (PLO):

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- etc.

Individualized Learning Objective (ILO) No. 1.

ILO No. 2.

ILO No. 3.

ILO No. 4.

ILO No. 5.

"Objectives that are open  
to change are changed  
less often and therefore,  
more often achieved."

Also, if for some reason the preset objectives do not match the expectations of the participants, the use of this instrument affords the opportunity for immediate change before plowing into the training event.

Furthermore, use of the instrument confirms the notion that objectives are adaptable. (The trainer and participants should keep in mind that objectives can change. Participants usually respond favorably to objectives that are flexible.) Objectives that are open to change are changed less often and therefore, more often achieved. The implementation of the Individualizing Learning Objectives instrument fosters the necessary openness to change.

Sidestepping for a moment, this instrument will demand of the trainer the ability to adapt preset material, resources presentation, and the general process of the training event. In most cases, the trainer can call upon the internal resources, the participants' experiences and personal resources, as an aid in this adaptation.

The following paragraphs detail the objectives and procedure, and provides the accompanying worksheet for instrument.

#### The Objectives:

1. To give the trainer an instrument for training that will enable the trainer to develop on site a learning design that is relevant to the needs of participants.
2. To give the trainer an instrument for training that will help to identify more specific learning goals for the training event.
3. To give the trainer an instrument for training that will help the trainer clarify his/her goals for a particular learning event or a particular part of a training event.
4. To give the trainer an instrument for training that will help to develop motivators for a particular learning event.
5. To give the trainer an instrument for training that will help the trainer and participants clarify

their objectives within a particular learning event.

6. To give the trainer an instrument for training that will help the trainer and participants to call upon their own internal resources as sources for more effective learning.

7. To give the trainer an instrument for training that can function as an evaluation tool at the end of a particular training event by individualizing learning objectives at the beginning of the event.

#### The Procedure:

1. The trainer begins the learning event with a general dialogue concerning the preset objectives.

2. Following the general dialogue, participants should form triads. (If there is a large number of participants, the small grouping should not exceed five per group or effectiveness will be lost.)

3. The trainer should proceed by distributing the *Individualizing Learning Objectives Worksheet* (Figure 1) to each participant.

4. The worksheet is completed by each participant and then shared with the other members of the triad.

5. The trainer should proceed by distributing newsprint and marker pens to each triad group for the purpose of recording their agreed-upon objectives for that triad.

6. The trainer should proceed by posting all the newsprints of each triad.

7. If applicable, the trainer may wish to briefly comment on the relevance of each objective to the broad goal of the particular learning event.

8. A general discussion for the purpose of modifying, combining, deleting, or adding to the preset objectives should follow. (Given the fact that the preset objectives, based on the original needs assessment, have been previously formulated by the trainer, the trainer now must see if participants accept these objectives as accurate translations of their learning needs. The exploration of objectives for preci-

sion can be a fairly technical and time-consuming activity, especially if an extensive list of learning objectives results. Therefore, it may be prudent to limit the objectives developed to a particular day's activities or a specific number of objectives per triad.)

9. The above steps should bring the trainer and participants to a contractual agreement on the objectives and the goal of the learning event.

10. The agreed-upon learning objectives should be posted for observation for the duration of the learning event. This posting will enable the trainer and participants to keep a constant focus on the direction of their desired learning. The agreed-upon individualized learning objectives should be used at the end of the learning event as a tool for evaluation.

#### REFERENCE

1. Knowles, Malcolm S., *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Andragogy vs. Pedagogy*, Association Press, New York, 1970, p. 51.

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