FUNDAMENTALS

Using Sequential Art in Training

Don't just tell participants your message. Show them.

By Edmond H. Legum

To make sense of how information fits together, participants sometimes need to see how lessons play out first. Incorporating stories with illustrations into your training session gives participants a fresh outlook on new information and helps them see their jobs from different points of view. As a result, they gain a better understanding of how their environment affects their work, and they find ways to improve their efforts.

Using sequential art, more commonly known as comic strips or storyboards, is one way that you can show learners the larger picture. Through a visual portrayal of thoughts, sounds, actions, and ideas, you can turn your training materials into effective lessons that keep people engaged. They'll relate to characters and plots, which increases attention and helps them interpret and retain your message.

Tell your story

The purpose of using sequential art is to help participants develop empathy through dramatic narration and illustration. As you cultivate your story, try to balance the realistic ideas with the novel

ideas. Show learners how their actions can lead to meaningful outcomes and why their behavior matters. When they see visual proof of applied concepts, they'll begin to realize how their performance affects their customers, the company, and themselves.

To begin the design phase, first decide how you want to package your message and what tone you'd like to set. Then, create an appropriate treatment that includes character descriptions and plot. Next, carefully break the plot down by defining what you want participants to see in each frame and on every page. Finally, write dialogue and add

narrative. As you work your way through the process, keep in mind these methods of using sequential art in training.

Mirror. In order to establish a connection with your participants, create a realistic depiction of activities and the workplace. For example, you might illustrate a new employee orientation with realistic representations of conditions, employees, and desired procedural and policy standards.

Magic Mirror. To capture participants' attention, lend some magic to your story by adding an unusual character. Remember Smokey Bear (a talking bear in a park ranger hat) and Mr. Zip (a quirky stick

figure postman)? Both are good examples of how to use identifiable characters to make messages more memorable.

Metaphor. Create a visual metaphor to stir the imagination. Provoke participants to compare and contrast what they see in your artwork with what takes place in their offices. You can tie your story together by repeating the same metaphorical images throughout your vignette. Look at the example of corporate leadership and communication skills above. King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table act as similes for upper- and middle-management. The skills of the populace are metaphors for employee competency.

Not only can sequential art help to captivate participants' attention, it can also relieve the weight of teaching sensitive issues. Using a mix of styles, for example, you can show a customer care representative working in a zoo and voice the various complaints through the animals. Compare the comic imagery of an angry orangutan with the actual angry behavior of an unsatisfied customer. The orangutan frees you to portray the situation with all of the passion that an unhappy customer might display, while avoiding damaging stereotypes.

Show time!

Once you've decided how you want your lesson to look, work with qualified illustrators who understand sequential art. If you don't already know an artist, you can shop for one online. Websites such as elanceonline.com and contractedwork.com let you post your illustration needs and solicit responses.

Consider the illustrator's style, emotion, clarity of images, use of perspective, and ability to dramatize. A good illustrator should create sketches for you to approve before progressing to the subsequent stages of inked art, colorization, and final production for printing.

Overall, the largest benefit of using sequential art in training is that participants can recognize meaning and emotional impact by identifying a chain of events and its consequences. When trainers combine story and images, they set an example of how the information can be applied so that participants can imitate what they see when then get back to their offices.

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