

# Poof—You're a Trainer!

Here's how a group of health professionals was successfully, though suddenly, taught to be quality trainers.

By TERRI KOBEL and ALICE FARON

**T**raining is done in some way, shape or form almost daily in many organizations. Sometimes the training is staged with great professionalism and success; many times it's little more than mediocre. The problem often stems from the false assumption that any professional is qualified to be a trainer. It ignores the fact that many people lack the skills to instruct their peers.

As a response to the increasing expectation that employees serve as part-time trainers, the education departments from Carle Foundation Hospital and Carle Clinic Association organized a series of workshops called "Focus on Learning." The objective of the series was to enhance the skills and confidence of individuals thrust into training situations. The premise for doing this was twofold: First, training was taking place daily in the hospital and clinic. Second, health professionals were, for the most part, basing their teaching strategies on their own experiences in high school, college or professional school. They had limited background in teaching adults—which differs greatly from teaching children.

The philosophy guiding the planning phases of the series was to teach adult learning strategies through role modeling. In this way, participants would experience, firsthand, quality adult instruction.

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*It's the first day for the new sales force. They sit in a classroom, eager to begin their training. The star sales assistant approaches the podium. She's never actually instructed before, but she's known for her dynamite presentations. There's no question that she'll be an effective speaker. But something goes awry. The hour-long session leaves the new employees confused and bored, and the sales assistant-turned-trainer discouraged. No one can figure out what went wrong.*

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## Setting up the workshops

The workshop series was divided into four 90-minute sessions entitled "The Adult Learner," "The Instructor," "Dynamic Learning Experiences" and "Putting It All Together." The sessions were offered two weeks apart. This schedule allowed participants the time to practice what they had learned, and to discuss successes and problems at the subsequent workshop.

Program notes were prepared for each workshop. The notes contained a skeletal outline of the material presented, as well as exercises for the participant to complete during the session.

Participants were drawn from various disciplines to encourage the exchange of different teaching styles. With the blueprint of the series completed, the first of the workshops began.

## The adult learner

This workshop provided assessments of each participant's educational philosophy and learning style. These

assessments initiated self-evaluation, and promoted constructive discussion.

A major objective of this workshop was to help participants understand the components of adult learning. The participants were asked to list, on separate chalkboards, statements describing learner-centered and instructor-centered instruction. From these lists, the principles of effective adult learning were identified.<sup>1</sup> The participants were then asked to consider their own teaching situations, and to develop strategies which incorporated learner-centered instruction.

## The instructor

The second workshop focused on teaching skills. Particular emphasis was placed on facilitative and nonfacilitative behaviors. Six categories of instructor behavior were identified. The participants offered typical instructor responses that would result from each of the behaviors. Following are the six categories and typical instructor responses to learners.<sup>2</sup>

- Advising and Evaluating (least facilitative)—"The best solution is . . ."
- Analyzing and Interpreting—"The reason you're having trouble is . . ."
- Reassuring and Supporting—"Don't worry, I know exactly how you feel . . ."
- Questioning—"What do you find confusing? . . ."
- Clarifying and Summarizing—"You seem to be saying . . ."
- Reflecting and Understanding of Feelings (Most facilitative)—"You seem very excited . . ."

Effective communication skills were highlighted in this session, with special emphasis on listening skills. To help

dramatize the nature of active listening, a portion of the Jones-Mohr Listening Test<sup>3</sup> was used. This test contains a series of audiotaped statements spoken in various tones of voice. Following each statement, participants chose from four explanations of what the speaker actually meant by the statement. Through this activity, the participants realized the necessity of using all five senses when they listen—not just their sense of hearing.

### Dynamic learning experiences

This workshop was designed to acquaint participants with methodologies not commonly used in adult instruction, but which provide exciting educational experiences for learners. During the session, the participants did a case study analysis and a demonstration exercise in class. Afterward, they discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the analyzed method for their own classroom use. The participants also performed a different type of demonstration. Each person demonstrated either how to tie a necktie or how to wrap a package. Again, discussion followed as to how the method could be used effectively in other adult learning situations.

A hand-out identifying other methods of instruction outlined method descriptions, advantages, disadvantages and criteria for selection. Methods included in the hand-out were group discussion, computer-assisted instruction, in-basket exercises and role play.

### Putting it all together

The last workshop gave participants an opportunity to put their new skills and knowledge into practice. It involved a five-minute videotaped presentation, followed by a feedback session from peers.

Several sessions were planned, each with five persons or less. The participants were asked to deliver a short instructional session. The ground rules for the taped sessions were as follows:

- come relaxed and ready to have fun;
- presenter gives lesson (three-five minutes only);
- presenter reacts to tape, noting positive features;
- group reacts to tape, noting positive features;
- presenter reacts to tape, noting areas that need improvement;
- group reacts to tape, noting areas that need improvement.

As the participants planned their presentations, they were asked to consider the following:

- How well did the instructor reflect effective adult learning principles?
  - learning climate
  - learner concern
  - pacing
  - motivating the learner
  - application/relevancy of material
  - awareness of varied learning styles
- How was the instructor a facilitator?
  - use of behavior change principles such as positive reinforcement, modeling, successive approximations, extinction, repetition
  - use of effective communication skills like attending, observing, listening, responding, questioning
  - awareness of a positive learning environment
- How was the lesson structured?
  - objectives stated
  - learning activities appropriate
  - learning tools appropriate

Due to its immediate feedback, this videotaping was probably the most important activity of the workshop series.

### Looking at the results

The "Focus on Learning" series proved successful in preparing nontrainers for training. The series will be revised in the future to reflect some of the results.

First, videotaping will be included in all four sessions. This will help the participants feel comfortable more quickly in front of the camera.

Plus, a contract for the series will be developed. This will encourage participation at all four sessions. Finally, to be explored is the possibility of observing participants' behavior once they return to work. That would be the finest measure of the program's success.

### References

1. Knowles, M. (1972). *The modern practice of adult education: Andragogy vs. pedagogy*. New York: Association Press.
2. Wittner, J., & Myrick, R. D. (1974). *Facilitative teaching: Theory and practice*. Pacific Palisades, Calif.: Goodyear Publishing Co.
3. *Jones-Mohr listening test*. (1976). LaJolla, Calif.: University Associates.

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