Who Forgot the Leader's Guide?

Sometimes incomplete—and sometimes entirely forgotten—the leader's guide spells success or failure for your training program. Creation of a strong guide is the HRD professional's imperative.

By STACY C. STEWART

Nearly everyone who has designed a media-based training program or purchased prepared training programs has been exposed to a wide array of leader's or facilitator's guides. Unfortunately, the leader's guide is often one of the most neglected and ill-designed portions of a training program. Many excellent film, video and slide training programs are not used correctly—or spend their days gathering dust—because their leader's guides are either inadequate or nonexistent. It's as if the leader's guide is an afterthought to the instructional design process. The problem, sad to say, has been around for some time now. As Martin Broadwell said in these pages nearly two years ago (*TDJ*, May 1982), "When it comes to designing a course, new trainers should understand and believe that a good design—telling students and teachers how to increase learning possibilities—will carry a poor instructor much further than a good instructor can carry a poor design." Treating the design as a necessary link in preparing training materials should be a major priority.

The leader's guide is like a task analysis of the training program. To be viable, it must include the program overview, pretraining activities, instructor tips and material on how to conduct the training itself. It is a step-by-step procedure to define who does what, when they do it and how it is to be done. It should be sufficiently detailed so that the part-time

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trainer (e.g., sales or production manager) can pick it up, rehearse and present.

The first section the leader's guide should include is a program overview, including:

■ a purpose, briefly defining the rationale behind why the particular program was developed;

■ objectives;

■ an explanation of who the program is geared for, including any prerequisites;

■ a statement of the length of the training session, including procedures, if it is to take place over several weeks.

The second area to be considered is the

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pre-training activities section. This section describes the actions and preparations that must take place prior to the training. It should include:

■ *Group size.* Explain the size of group for which this training is best suited, stating maximum and minimum number of participants.

■ *Reserving a meeting room.* Emphasize that the meeting room should be accessible before the meeting starts for rehearsal, equipment check and set-up.

■ *Setting up the room.* Briefly describe options available for arranging the meeting room. Provide diagrams.

■ *Notifying participants.* The participants should be notified in writing a couple of weeks prior to the training session; notification should include time, date, place and topic of the meeting. Recommend that a member of senior management sign the letter, and include a sample format for the letter.

■ *Assembling equipment and materials.* Make a list of all the equipment and materials the instructor and participants will need.

■ *Setting time and date for next meeting.* If there is to be more than one meeting, recommend a time schedule or sequence of meeting dates.

■ *Rehearsal.* Recommend areas that may need more preparation time, e.g., role plays, preparing flip charts or any special dialogue.

After you have considered the pre-training activities, you need to explain any special features of the training program. These instructor tips include such topics as suggestions for conducting group discussions, types of slides used, zeroing the tape counter, role play assignment charts and legend for symbols used.

Now comes the heart of the leader's guide: the task analysis of the actual training session. Leave nothing to chance. The guide should be designed in such detail that in case of an emergency (e.g., laryngitis) another part-time trainer could, with little advanced warning, go to the leader's guide and conduct a well organized and, depending on the individual's skills, effective session.

When designing this section, you must:

■ Give the instructor some suggested introductions for the different segments of the training program, e.g., workbook activities, role plays, film/slides/video presentations and group activities.

■ Make sure the leader has the answers to all workbook activities. Include a reduced copy of the workbook page in the leader's guide.

■ If there are group activities such as discussions or role plays, recommend how to divide the groups.

■ Furnish the trainer with suggested questions for discussion activities.

■ If the training calls for any games or role plays, give explicit directions on how to conduct the activity.

■ If the videotape or audiotape has modules or sections, furnish counter numbers for representative machines.

■ Use symbols to alert the trainer to activities coming up. After looking at a page of print for 15 minutes, you can easily get lost.

These are just some of the ways this section can be designed to help the instructor. The important thing is to design it step-by-step as you, yourself, would conduct the training session.

One problem often encountered involves state media libraries. They are responsible for sending out hundreds of films and videotape programs a year to teachers and trainers throughout the state. Unfortunately, leader's guides are not always sent with the programs, and many teachers do not even know they exist.

This serious problem can be alleviated if you put a clause in the contract, when you sell or rent your product, stating that assurance of the trainees' learning from the product is contingent on the use of the leader's guide. You should also build some references into the lessons themselves that refer back to the leader's guide. A boldly lettered packing list—to be checked by the shipper—should be included when the program is sent. Such a list might include modules, workbooks (how many), test forms (how many), job aids (how many) and videotape, films or slides.

To design this type of leader's guide takes time, effort and, of course, money. All three of these variables must be considered when the project is being budgeted. Frequently, the leader's guide can approach the cost of the core training materials themselves in design, production time and expense. But it's definitely worth it. The value of an effective leader's guide cannot be overstated. When a leader's guide is fully thought out, it adds professionalism to the training and instills confidence in the trainer. As an instructor, it is heartening to know that you are not alone up front—that someone has evaluated the alternatives and designed an in-depth plan that you can implement.

Design for others as you would have them design for you.