

TRAINING 101

Windsurfing 101

By Dan Michaluk

It's a breeze.

Illustration by Peter Bennett

It was the summer of 1984. All I wanted was a week of skills coaching and a certificate that would pave the way to a cushy job in the sun paying more than \$5.50 per hour.

I sat quietly in the back seat of our Buick LeBarron as my parents drove two hours north of Toronto to Lake Couchiching, where I was enrolled in a Canadian Yachting Association windsurfing instructor course. I was excited but didn't really know what to expect.

Fortunately, I got everything I didn't know to expect and more. That course taught me that every lesson I ever teach should include these four steps:

1. Set specific, clear, and measurable learning objectives.
2. Divide information into logical chunks.
3. Maximize audience participation.
4. Include an evaluative conclusion.

When I left Lake Couchiching, I didn't fully understand how that simple

Sample Exercise: Snappers
Practice breaking down simple, everyday activities into the four steps. Here are some suggested activities:

- Make a phone call.
- Fill a car with gas.
- Light a campfire.

Start with simple activities and move to more complex ones. Almost any task can be simplified into logical chunks.

model would help improve my communication method and style.

Sixteen years later, I've instructed thousands of people using those four how-to-teach-windsurfing steps. I've taught weather theory in Australia, wavesailing safety in Maui, and the ever-challenging step gybe in Cape Hatteras. Whether the lessons were skill- or knowledge-intensive, simple or complex, those four steps always got the lesson across. But I've also used them in a scholastic career (teaching colleagues), in a brief legal career (teaching adjudicators), and in my current career as a creator of soft-skills e-learning content (teaching business professionals).

I now see the teaching model I learned at Lake Couchiching as a gift. Simple yet powerful, the four steps can help you make clear, organized, and effective lessons on any subject. Let's take a closer look.

1. Set specific, clear, and measurable learning objectives. Begin your lesson planning process by drafting a strong statement of learning objectives. Objectives set audience expectations and, more important, create a measurable target against which you evaluate your lesson.

Break objectives down into measurable components, and don't use jargon. To ensure measurability, avoid subjective and relative language in favor of objective

language. Always test an objective by asking, "How will I determine if I've successfully taught what I set out to teach?"

Setting objectives for skills training exercises is relatively easy. Rather than tell a windsurfing student, "The objective of this on-water lesson is to improve your sail flip," I say, "By the end of this on-water lesson, you'll be able to complete six out of 10 overhand to underhand sail flips without falling in the water or dropping the sail."

Setting objectives for knowledge-intensive subjects is more challenging, but possible. For example, when teaching change management interventions, it's best not to set an immeasurable objective such as, "Participants will understand their options in choosing change management interventions." Instead, create objective and quantitative measures of success such as, "Participants will be able to identify four change management interventions relevant to their organizations along with two pros, two cons, and two implementation challenges of each." Look for ways to increase the usefulness of your learning objectives.

2. Divide information into logical chunks. Help your audience understand and remember complex subjects by breaking down the information into logical chunks. In his 1956 classic article, "The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two," Princeton psychology professor George A. Miller argues that working memory can process only five to nine items at a time. Today, I keep a binder with more than 20 novice, intermediate, and advanced skills broken down into five or fewer steps.

Chunking is equally effective in a business context and essential for communication of any topic, in any medium. In fact, the rise of e-learning has brought chunking to the forefront of learning design. When the computer is the learning medium, it's essential to captivate audiences with short and

easy-to-follow information pieces.

Don't underestimate the power of a well-developed and clear model. Take, for example, Roger Fisher and William Ury's techniques for principled negotiation made famous by their landmark book *Getting to Yes*:

- Separate the people from the problem.
- Focus on interests rather than positions.
- Generate a variety of options.
- Insist on the use of objective criteria.

By taking a complex subject and making it simple, Fisher and Ury made negotiation accessible to millions.

3. Maximize audience participation. Stop talking at your audience! Rather, engage students through participative, problem-solving exercises. I've never taught someone to windsurf by flipchart presentation. On the contrary, in a typical lesson, I minimize my participants' passive learning time and maximize their time spent learning by doing. Whether it's on a dryland simulator or on the water, windsurfing students learn best by trying, making mistakes, and trying again.

Why should business learning be any different? Challenging your audience with business-relevant problems puts participants in charge of their learning and promotes a personalized learning event shaped by unique knowledge, skills, and experience. In addition, understanding is enhanced as learners wrestle with ideas, become emotionally engaged, and truly experience a subject in action.

When you choose to deliver lessons by computer, the stakes increase. Instructors who transfer traditional content to a computer without making a strong effort to redesign for maximal interactivity risk losing audiences. (Why would anyone tolerate a computer-based lecture when stock reports, sports scores, and similar distractions are only a click away?) Giving students the ability to navigate through a curriculum and answer multiple-choice questions isn't offering

true interactivity; smart designs use new technology to challenge learners with relevant and challenging exercises.

In windsurfing, I use a dryland simulator to promote learning by doing in safe and controlled surroundings. Similarly, trainers should maximize the participative benefits of technology and use computers for the practice of new skills and application of new knowledge—without risking adverse business consequences.

4. **Include an evaluative conclusion.** Always verify through an evaluative conclusion whether you've met your learning objectives. This isn't a recap. Through formal or informal methods, take the time to test whether you've met each learning objective. Your evaluation approach doesn't have to be as direct and traditional as a written test. For business-specific lessons, application exercises that invite learners to apply newly acquired knowledge or skills to specific and real business problems create strong opportunities to evaluate learning. If problems are uncovered, make sure you have an opportunity to fill in the gaps.

Of course, this simple four-step teaching model isn't revolutionary, but hidden in its simplicity are truth and elegance. The model has proven itself over a number of years and in a variety of teaching situations. Whether you're teaching on the beach, in the classroom, or through a computer, consider using the steps to develop clear, organized, and effective lessons.

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