



# Training the Trainer 101

Strengthen learning by getting the most out of your newfound presenters. By Sharon Merrill

When you're sitting in the audience listening to a subject matter expert, it's easy for your mind to suddenly wander to your grocery list, your child's play, or that new iPod—anything but the topic before you.

Even when a training session covers an important topic, is well organized, and is led by an expert, its delivery can be as dry as toast.

Not everyone who is asked to deliver training is a trainer, and yet, many are called on to act in that capacity. We all know someone who attended a class and was told to "come back and teach it to us," as though magically that person would become skilled and comfortable in their newfound role of trainer.

Frequently, the individual responsible for leading a training session is unaware of adult learning theory, or ways

to increase interest, enhance retention, and emphasize the applicability of course material. The newly appointed trainer may have never designed a curriculum or may tend to struggle with visual aids, yet we entrust them to the learner to facilitate, instruct, and teach.

A train-the-trainer class is beneficial whether one has presented on several occasions or lacks the skills and knowledge needed for an effective presentation. The instructional systems design model is based on the U.S. Navy's integrated approach to training (upon which I have expanded to include class-

room management). It demonstrates in six modules what a train-the-trainer course should integrate into the learning experience. Each area within the instructional systems design model contributes to the learners' ability to receive, retain, and apply information.

The needs analysis assesses the aptitude of the learner and determines specific information required for him to perform his job. The needs analysis identifies what the learner already knows and the skills that are needed to enhance work performance. It is important for a trainer to be able to answer these questions because they will assist him in identifying where knowledge gaps are and how they can be addressed.

An analysis can be assessed in a variety of ways, including direct observation, questionnaires, consultation with persons in key positions, interviews, focus groups, surveys, tests, and work samples. Once it is determined that a need exists, the trainer must determine what the learning objectives will be. Learning objectives describe the intended result of the instruction, the conditions under which performance should take place, and how well the learner must perform.

To enhance effectiveness, the trainer should also assess the level of experience that the learner has in his field, his tenure with the organization, and any related skills or knowledge he possess.

Instructional design defines how a program is constructed to meet the needs of the learner. The learning professional has to be able to design an effective approach for the learner and respect that each learner's needs are different.

Design determines the content of the lesson and what the learner needs to know or do. An effective design includes a specific plan, with timeframes that allow the trainer to meet the needs of the organization and the individual learner.

The design should have an opening, which could include an icebreaker, introductions, an agenda, and a list

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of objectives. This should be followed by an explanation to the participant of what they he is going to learn—this involves giving the big picture first, then moving from general ideas to more specific ones. Adult learning theory suggests that adults learn best from the most fundamental concepts to the most complex. The learning professional should never give everything at once, as it can be overwhelming for the learner.

Instruction delivery reflects the presentation skills of the learning professional and how the information is delivered. When the learning professional is designing the presentation, he should be mindful of how the learner will retain the information. For one, the generation of the learner is an important consideration for the trainer. Do they like the bells and whistles of slide presentations or do they find them to be distracting or a turn-off to learning?

In delivering the presentation, the trainer should always prepare the learner for what he will be learning. Studies have shown that it takes three times for information to actually stick. Tell the learner what he is are going to learn; explain why the task is important; explain when and where the task is performed; and always define any terms, abbreviations, and acronyms that will be used, even if the learner is already perhaps familiar with them.



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## Learning 101

**Anticipate some of the questions that learners may have, involve the learner when questions are asked, and return the question back to the class. By so doing, trainers are testing their knowledge while simultaneously responding to the question.**

Information is more meaningful when

- a demonstration is provided
- critical areas are identified
- specific features are pointed out
- examples are given
- nonapplicable examples and common errors or trouble spots are identified.

Have the learner practice in small steps first, and then perform the entire task. Correct errors if necessary, get the learner involved, and follow up with immediate feedback. Encourage questions and check for understanding by asking questions such as, “Why would this be important to know?” and “What do you think this means?” Offer examples in the form of real experiences to clarify a point, and identify and label important information.

There are a variety of instructional methods used to deliver information, and each has its own purpose.

The learning professional should determine when to use role play, lecturates, lectures, case studies, and demonstrations. The instructional methodology must be appropriate for the information being presented, and at the same time, meet the learning style of the learner.

The trainer wants to ensure that the methodology used will be successful in transferring knowledge effectively. Demonstration and direct instruction are designed to assist the learner in retaining concepts and skills. Case studies are used to develop analytic and problem-solving skills. Mini lectures and discussions work best when time is limited, and both increase the learner’s interpersonal skills.

Small-group discussion allows for greater participation, and learners often feel more comfortable. Ultimately, with each method, real situations should be

practiced as much as possible. Deciding which method to use will depend on the learners and how they apply the information provided. One effective method of instruction is role play; however, very few people are comfortable with role play.

To help reduce anxiety about role playing, trainers can schedule the role play for later in the day or later on in the program; ask for volunteers ahead of time; provide a full explanation of the purpose and outcomes of the role play; and if appropriate, let participants develop their own situations.

Effective classroom management allows trainers to present material in a professional manner. Activities that occur in the classroom include creating introducing and closing material, setting the tone in the classroom, affirming the importance of energy boosters and breaks, anticipating and generating questions, pacing the material, and managing the various personalities of the participants.

Trainers should set the tone at the beginning of the class while the material is being introduced and the logistics shared. Participants can then be asked to place cell phones on vibrate, and to avoid sidebar conversations. Remind them that no questions are silly and to respect all learners.

The trainer can gauge the learner’s perception of the program throughout the presentation. The learner’s body language may be open or closed; clues such as folded arms or lack of attention are additional signs. If participants are asking questions or relating experiences, this is an indication of interest and engagement.

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Another key for trainers is to be honest. If the answer to a question is not known, encourage trainers to let the learner know that they will get back to him. Faster learners can assist slower learners.

Managing the classroom can be a daunting task, especially if the learners



do not want to be there. Trainers should remember to never argue with participants and to keep the lesson moving toward its objectives. There might be someone who is constantly talking. The best way for a trainer to address this behavior is to ask that individual direct questions and stand near her.

Other common personalities include the naysayer—one who readily dismisses opinions of others. The best way for trainers to address this behavior is to cite facts or typical experiences of others. An appropriate response might begin, “I appreciate your experience. Studies show that...”

Regarding individuals who engage in sidebar conversations, trainers can include them in the conversation, asking questions along the lines of, “Is there something you’d like to share with the class?”

Trainers should be sure to think about what they would do if the equipment were to malfunction, if the materials for the class did not arrive on time, or if some of the required materials weren’t available.

Evaluation is an effective way of providing objective feedback to the learning professional. It is a way to determine whether you have accomplished what you set out to do and if the learner received the knowledge and skills he needed. In addition, this tool is a guide to assist learning professionals with future planning and next steps.

The trainer has a significant effect on the organization’s cost savings. Therefore, when the novice trainer has received training herself, she is more comfortable, better prepared, and more knowledgeable about herself and the material.

Ultimately, a learning organization should ensure that each person given the marching orders to “come back and teach” will be well equipped to do so.

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