

# Training 101

It also enhances trainees' interest and commitment to the program, because they have had a part in shaping the agenda. Be sure to list their objectives and concerns on a flip chart. That shows that you understand their present outlook as well as their future goals. It also shows that you intend to incorporate their ideas into the agenda. During the session, don't forget to refer back to their objectives as you present relevant material.

## Challenge participants to seek change

An introduction must make clear that the workshop objective is change, even when change is difficult or threatening.

Even the most uninvolved attendee must conclude that change is what workshops are all about. Yet the words must be said—and heard. And acknowledged. For the goal is intentional change, the kind of change that occurs when trainees say to themselves, "This is better, or quicker, or more rewarding than the way I've been doing it. Therefore, though it means changing my habits, my mind, or my attitude, I am going to do things differently after this."

So, you might say something like this: "Change, while intellectually understandable, is also threatening and difficult for most of us. We all recognize our fondness for the status quo—for the 'dailyness' of our working lives. For each one of us who is excited about trying a new cereal, a new restaurant, or a new vacation spot, hundreds wouldn't call it breakfast without Rice Krispies, wouldn't dine anyplace except our favorite Italian restaurant, or wouldn't think of going on vacation anyplace except the same cabin at the same lake.

"However, each time we do something by habit, we foreclose any chance we might have to do it better. So, during this workshop, let's

all—and I include myself—keep our options open. Let's look for ways to improve by changing."

That establishes an "openness to change" theme that can be reiterated and reinforced during pertinent workshop sessions.

The introduction is now complete. Your credentials are established. Trainees are braced for change and are confident of the value of the workshop. You're on your way to a successful program.

An introduction alone can't make or break a workshop. But a "bad" introduction—one that doesn't focus on the four goals—leaves formidable barriers to overcome. And a well-planned and presented introduction—the "preliminary part"—ensures the rapport and motivation necessary for a successful "main part."

## Getting Them Back From the Break

*Adapted from Presentations Plus, by David A. Peoples (John Wiley & Sons, 1988), Box 670505, Marietta, GA 30067.*

I don't know any bigger problem in a training session than getting them back from the break. If your scheduled 15-minute break turns into 30 minutes, and you have two breaks in the morning and two in the afternoon, you have lost an hour of time on your schedule.

Before we talk about solving the problem, let's talk about the frequency of breaks. You should never go for two hours without a break. On the other hand, if you take a break in less than an hour, you are not making efficient use of your time or the audience's time. The right time for a break lies somewhere between those two extremes.

However, the breaks have to be planned in conjunction with the duration of a presentation. For example, suppose your presentation

takes an hour and 45 minutes. Should you take a break after 45 minutes? I think not. A better plan is to identify a specific place in the presentation where you could have the audience take a stand-up stretch while you continue the presentation. A good time to do that is when you tell a joke, a story, or a personal experience.

For example, you might say, "Let me tell you a personal experience that illustrates the point we're talking about. While I do, why don't we all stand up and stretch our legs." That's smooth, flows well, and seems to be naturally built into the presentation. Don't forget to invite participants to sit back down at the end of your story.

Let's take another example. Suppose you have a 30-minute presentation that follows a 45-minute presentation, with no break in between. Even though the elapsed time is only an hour and 15 minutes, you will be well advised to ask the audience to take an in-place 60-second stretch before you start.

You need to give trainees a mental break from the first presentation. A stand-up stretch will help to do that. It will wake them up, get the juices flowing, and psychologically reset them to zero in preparation for your presentation.

The worst way to have a break is to be motoring through your presentation, look down at your watch, and suddenly announce, "Oh my goodness, I didn't realize what time it is—would you like to take a break?" On the contrary, breaks should be planned and built into your presentation at specific and strategic points.

The next rule is to have everybody on the same time. If there is a clock on the wall, you might suggest that trainees set their watches to the time of the wall clock. If there is no wall clock, ask them to set their watches to your watch.

Another rule is this: don't announce the duration of the break.

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Instead, announce the start-back time. For example, don't say "Let's take a 10-minute break," but "Let's take a break; we'll start back at 10:30." That will put the focus on when you are going to start. If you just announce a 10-minute break, people won't remember when the 10 minutes started.

## Burning issues

Everyday, millions of people turn on the television soap operas. Some people will plan their entire day around "The Edge of Night." How do the networks get people to do that? They do it by giving the audience a compelling reason to tune back in. Just before the "break" (the end of yesterday's episode), they built up to an emotional event, a trauma, a surprise, or an unanswered question with a burning issue—"is Suzie really pregnant?"

In our own way, we need to do the same thing in planning a break. It needs to be strategically placed in the presentation at a point of high interest. We will provide the answer right after the break. We also need to give the audience a "preview of coming attractions."

For example, in my financial presentation, I say, "When we return from the break, we will examine the real truth about your broker, your banker, and your financial advisor." In seminars on giving presentations, I may say, "When we return from the break, we will examine the Seven Deadly Sins—seven guaranteed ways to give a dull, dry, and boring presentation." Those are subjects that have both intellectual and emotional interest for the audience. We should plan our breaks around the high points of our presentations.

But the break is not a stand-alone event. If the presentation should have started at 9 a.m., but you started 10 minutes late, that sends a message to the audience that you will also start late after the break. You pay the price in more ways than

one if you don't start on time.

On the other hand, if you started your presentation on time, then you have signaled to the audience that you will also start on time after the break.

## Give them a break

Another technique for getting them back from the break is to anticipate their needs and requirements.

In my company, for example, people head for the phones at the break. They want to call the office, check in, and see if any fires are burning back at the ranch. Well, there's no way you can take a 10-minute break and get them back from the phones. So you might think the answer is to take a longer break. Possibly, but another solution is better.

If the meeting lasts a half-day, you can announce up front that there will be a 10-minute break and a 20-minute break. You further state that the intent of the long break is to give the attendees time to call the office. That way, the total break time is no greater than if you had two 15-minute breaks, but the breaks are better planned to meet the needs of the audience.

Another technique for getting trainees back from the break is to get their agreement on how long the break should be. Here's the way it works. When you come to the place in the presentation where you have planned the break, you announce to the group that you are going to take a break. You then state that it is their meeting, and ask them how long a break they want. You might prompt them by saying "10 minutes?" "15 minutes?"


Someone will volunteer a number, such as 10 minutes. You then ask the audience, "Is 10 minutes all right?" "Does anybody have a problem with 10 minutes?" If there is no response, you can announce the time the break will be over (10 minutes later).

What has happened is that you have established a psychological agreement. Since no one objected to the 10 minutes, and you gave them the opportunity to do just that, your audience may feel compelled to be back on time.

Another technique is used at the theatre, the opera, and the symphony. During the intermission, blink the room and hall lights to announce that the show is about to begin.

Or, you can play dirty pool and show a short movie right after the break. That gives you an excuse to close the doors and keep them closed. Anyone who does try to get in is faced with a pitch-black room, must stumble over people, and may end up sitting in somebody's lap. I assure you, at the next break they will be back on time.

Continuing with the "psychological-warfare" strategy, another thing you can do at the start of the meeting sends a powerful message to the audience. Keep the meeting room doors closed until the exact time the meeting is to start. Then open the doors and let the audience in. Many people have never experienced that, but they'll understand the message: "This is a business meeting and it's going to be run like a business meeting."

A final tip on breaks is to make a transparency that shows the location of restrooms, phones, coffee, and other services. That will save everyone time and questions. Trainees will also be impressed with your foresight, planning, and thoughtfulness. 

*"Training 101" is edited by Cathy Petrini. Send your short articles for consideration to Training 101, Training & Development Journal, 1630 Duke Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313.*