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HERE'S A PARTICIPANT-CENTERED
APPROACH THAT CAN HELP YOU
ACCOMPLISH YOUR LEARNING GOALS . . .

MAKE YOUR COURSE EVALUATION WORK

BY THOMAS J.
MURTHA

Course evaluations are generally considered a way to give instructors feedback when a training course is completed. Here's a participant-centered approach that accomplishes these learning goals:

1. provides end-of-the-day review
2. provides start - of - the - day warm-up
3. focuses the group on the learning process — how did we learn
4. gives the instructor data on what's been learned each day
5. provides the individual with data on the learning group

Each day of your course, during the last 10 minutes, have participants complete the "Post-Meeting Reaction Form" reproduced on page 51. Emphasize that *careful* completion of this form is a learning tool. Tell participants to reflect quietly on the events of the day to pinpoint *what* they have learned and to identify *how* they learned it. Urge participants to look for specific, concrete ways in which they can apply the learning back home.

This brief, reflective review of the day's work helps participants to better integrate and remember what was learned. Review and repetition are often difficult to schedule in a short-term course, and so this form is designed to enable you to combine daily review with evaluations.

Participants need continually to think about how they might apply what they are learning. The spe-

cificity (or lack of it) in participants' responses to the question about how they'll use the learning gives the instructor important information about what was *really* learned.

Having participants list effective teaching methods focuses them on the "how" of the learning process. Learning is reinforced when participants can identify the activity or activities where the learning emerged.

Because the form will be handed in, have participants use a code number on the evaluation form to preserve anonymity and ensure candor. Collect the forms and compile a short summary of the responses some time before class begins the next day.

Getting a group started on subsequent days is a lot easier when you use a summary of the previous day's evaluations as a warm-up activity and review. First return the forms to the participants (they will recognize their own code numbers).

The forms then become a record for participants, listing what they have learned and how they intend to use the learning. As you read aloud the summary of the group's responses, each participant gets some ideas of the group consensus about the course. If most participants thought something useful was overlooked by an individual participant, that person is alerted to the fact that something important might have been missed. As the groups hear about how others intend to use what they have learned, individuals are in-

duced to take yet another look at ways to apply the material. The summaries often provoke comments and questions which were not possible until participants had time to let material sink in and until they heard how others reacted to the course.

Using daily evaluation forms can be particularly helpful to instructors introducing new material or activities. The form provides instant feedback on the effectiveness of what has not been used before.

When participants' feedback is summarized and shared with them, the instructor creates a powerful learning opportunity for them, both while gathering the feedback and while disseminating it. After all, none of us is as smart as all of us.

Thomas J. Murtha develops and conducts workshops for the United States Office of Personnel Management in Philadelphia, Pa. Previously he worked as a free-lance consultant on Organizational Development in New York and New Jersey.

POST-MEETING REACTION FORM

The purposes of this activity are:

1. Provide an opportunity to review the day's work.
2. Give the instructor some idea about what was helpful to you and what was not.
3. Give you an opportunity to comment on the instructor's performance.
4. Allow the instructor to provide summaries of these responses so you can compare your reactions to others' reactions.

Answer *all* questions.

1. List three ideas or concepts presented today which were most helpful for you.
2. Describe how you intend to apply "back home" each helpful concept or idea. Be specific.
3. List the techniques or activities used in today's sessions which best helped you to understand the material.
4. Give your reasons for selecting each.
5. List the concepts, techniques, or activities which were *not* helpful.
6. Give your reasons for seeing it as *not* helpful.

(Use the reverse side for any further comments you care to make.)

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