Spicing Up Classroom Training

Trainers can add zing to a leader guide with a few simple tips.　　　　By Matthea Marquart

Trainers are frequently hamstrung by workshop leader guides that are less than ideal. To add to the challenge, trainers must deliver high-quality programs without making substantive changes to a guide that has been approved by management. While this task may seem difficult, a few quick fixes can greatly improve three common workshop weaknesses while maintaining the integrity of mandated content.

To spice up a lengthy classroom lecture, stay true to the content, but make it more appealing by identifying the main sections and preparing a visual aid for each one ahead of time. A simple visual can be a chart with three columns: one that lists what participants already know (K), a second that outlines what they wish to learn (W), and a third that includes what they learned (L).

Begin by asking participants what they already know about the first main idea. Write their responses in the K column. Next, ask them what they would like to learn about the subject and write their responses in the W column. The participants' responses to this question will keep you from talking about information that is already familiar to them and help you focus participants' attention on new information they want to know.

Address all learning styles

At this point, participants are ready for a mini-lecture on the first main section. After the session, the facilitator should ask participants what they learned and capture this in the L column of the chart. Repeat this for the rest of the main ideas to keep participants engaged in the learning process. If time permits, involve participants more actively by inviting volunteers to complete the columns or by breaking participants into groups to fill out the K and W columns themselves beforehand and the L column after each mini-lecture. The group work will help participants process the concepts more thoroughly as well as clarify any remaining questions they may have.

Add variety to your program by creating graphics. For example, a Venn diagram with overlapping circles

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is a great way to compare concepts that have common links. A triangle is a straightforward way to frame one concept with three main points, whereas a box divided into four squares is a basic way to introduce a concept with four main ideas. A staircase model is an easy way to present ideas that build on each other. Visual aids will help participants understand and remember new information, and if they fill out the graphic elements in groups, they will address all three main learning styles—auditory, visual, and kinesthetic—rather than just the auditory style addressed during a lecture.

If you are required to cover every slide in a PowerPoint presentation, print out the slides and use them as an engaging activity rather than as an 80-slide lecture that will surely put even the most well-intentioned participants to sleep. Break participants into groups, give each group a section of the printed presentation, and ask them to think of creative ways to teach the material. When the groups are ready to share ideas collectively, they can click through the slides as part of their presentation. This technique still requires participants to read each slide in the mandated order, but it will greatly increase participants' interest.

Increase retention with team activities

Another simple activity calls for breaking participants into groups and giving each group all or some of the printouts shuffled out of order. Challenge the groups to figure out the correct slide order. When the time is up, show the electronic presentation quickly so groups can check their work and you can answer any questions. This activity will not only ensure that participants read each slide, but it will encourage them to process the information on the slides as well.

A final quick activity involves taping up the slide printouts in order on the walls, with blank flipchart paper posted underneath each slide or set of slides. Each participant should be given a marker and be asked to respond to the slides with questions, comments, or even drawings they feel sum up the points visually. If they have no questions or comments, they can draw a check mark to indicate that they read the slide. If there are many participants,

Team activities will result in higher retention of the material than if you read each slide to participants.

post more than one set of the PowerPoint slides and flipcharts on the wall so that everyone has the physical space to read the slides and respond to them.

During the debriefing session, ask participants to sum up the comments and ask the questions, and then flesh out the points that need deeper explanation. This technique allows participants to review familiar content while spending more time on new material. Again, participants will stay awake and involved in the process.

You also can create an interactive group activity based on the PowerPoint slides, such as a scavenger hunt in which teams are given a sheet of questions or ideas to look for in the taped-up slide printouts. Other group activities using printouts include creating a top 10 list or an A to Z list of concepts in the slides, in which one concept is listed for each letter of the alphabet. For example, if the slides focus on customer service quality, A to Z concepts might include C for customer service and Q for quality. These team activities will result in higher retention

of the material than if you merely read each slide to participants. When conducting a debriefing, progress through the presentation quickly to clarify points, emphasize key issues, and answer questions.

Get everyone involved

Instead of handing out a tired quiz at the end of a session, put energy into a dull routine by using the questions to create an interactive activity that appeals to multiple learning styles. This eliminates the usual divide where one or two people provide all the answers and everyone else daydreams. Breaking participants into pairs or groups increases the likelihood that everyone will think about the questions.

The quickest way to do this is to print out the questions and make enough copies for everyone. Pair up participants and let them know that they will be competing to see who can answer all of the questions first. When the first pair finishes, ask them to run through all the answers. At this point, the rest of the participants will be more eager to process the information and pay close attention.

A variation of this activity is to break participants into small groups and pair up the groups for a game show competition. As part of the competition, teams take turns asking each other one question at a time from the mandated list of questions, trying to choose the most difficult questions for the other team. To take it a step further, allow teams to create new questions for each other.

If you have time to prepare, type the questions onto a bingo card or use crossword puzzle software, which are freely available online, to easily transform the questions into a learning game for pairs or teams. With a bingo card, participants can walk around asking each other to sign boxes for which they know the answers, and with a crossword puzzle, participants can fill out the answers in pairs or teams.

To play a review game with the whole group broken into two or three teams,

type the questions onto a PowerPoint and start a team trivia game. Or, write the questions on flipchart paper and create a *Jeopardy!* board, complete with multiple questions scored at different levels per category. Using questions for games will result in higher participant involvement and retention.

Ultimately, you are responsible for transferring knowledge to participants with the goal of changing their workplace behavior.
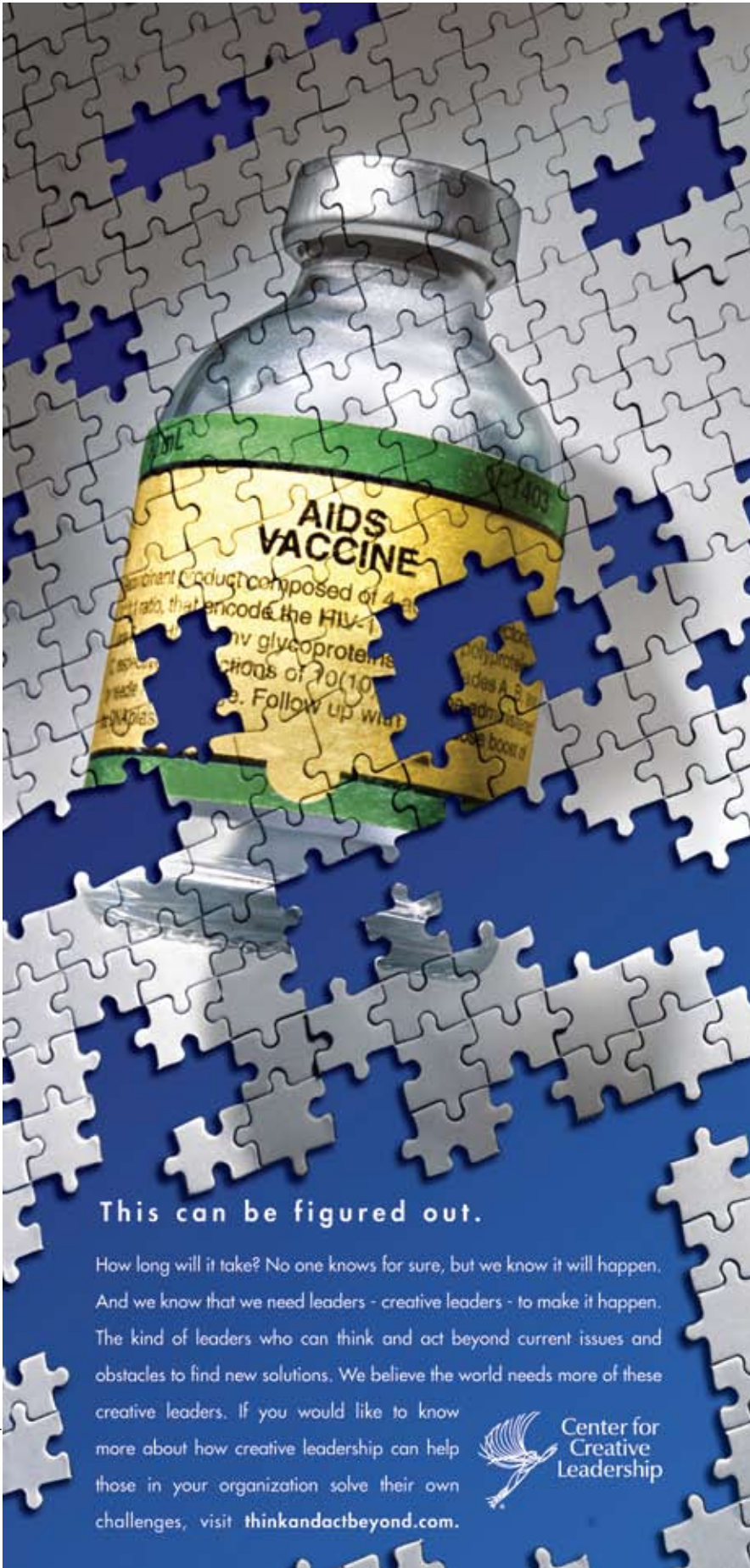
Ultimately, you are responsible for transferring knowledge to participants with the goal of changing their workplace behavior. With a few quick fixes, you can achieve the desired results using the mandated content even when working with an imperfect leader guide.

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