TRAINING 101

Quick Hits

How to give them—and how to make the most of them.

By Sandra Torres

Time is a precious commodity, and time spent in training away from "productive work" is considered by some people to be a necessary evil. Training professionals are accustomed to being asked, "Can't you do the training in less time?" So, in an effort to appease clients and thinking that one hour is better than nothing, some trainers try to cram four hours worth of training into one hour. Thus arises the question, Can "quick hit" training be successful?

Let's establish a common definition of *quick hit:* It's a one- to three-hour session in which people are away from work, together in a room, for the purpose of learning. Anything under an hour should be considered "hit and run" training, which has considerably less potential for achieving goals than a quick hit. But the answer is *yes:* Quick hits can be successful, given the right circumstances.

But first, it's important to distinguish between communication and training. When you have a new product

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to introduce, a new policy or policy change to share, or other important information to relay, a quick hit in the form of a short, concise meeting can be an effective means of communication. In those situations, instead of using training, that information could be delivered via email or by managers in regularly scheduled team meetings.

As all training professionals know, teaching people how to do something requires knowledge or skill transfer, which takes time to accomplish. If you cram four hours worth of training into one hour, you'll most likely choose to eliminate discussion and practice sessions that are critical to the skill-transfer process. With those eliminations, you run the risk of delivering a session that will have little or no impact on performance and behavior. That can be detrimental to your reputation and that of the entire training function.

Making quick hits work for you

You can use quick sessions effectively in a number of situations.

Follow-up training. Conduct follow-up training to reinforce what was learned in an earlier, more extensive session. Bring people back together for a few hours after they've had a chance to practice what was learned during the session to discuss what did and didn't work. That gives participants a chance to share their successes and failures and learn from the experiences of others.

Q&A sessions. Conduct a Q&A session on a particular topic to save hours of confusion and lost resources. For example, imagine that your organization recently implemented a new technology and people are having difficulty with certain procedures. Ask them to come to a meeting prepared with questions, and be sure to have a subject matter expert present.

Pretraining overviews. For managers to support the material you present in training, they need to understand what you'll be covering and how to use the skills. A short session to introduce managers to the material is an effective way to get their buy-in. If you can get that, managers will be more likely to support participants when they return to their jobs.

Delivering sensitive messages. Sometimes, it's necessary to bring people together to make a sensitive announcement so that they can air their concerns or express their emotions. And it lets you address (and possibly avoid) rumors and gauge employees' reaction.

Satisfying clients

Trainers know that skill transfer requires time and practice. When a client requests that you reduce a two-day session to four hours, how can you respond in a way that satisfies the client?

Explain what will and will not result. Understanding the results your clients expect from training is important, especially when you've been asked to do it in less time than is necessary for effective results. Clearly state the possible outcomes when the training lasts for two days; then clearly state the possible outcomes from a four-hour session. Point out that when you decrease training time, you have to eliminate the practice and discussion pieces and that those affect learning. Without them, you're just relaying information, and that can be done in other ways.

Most clients won't be willing to sacrifice training results, so you'll gain more training time. But if a client insists on shortening the training, ask him or her to help you decide which learning objectives to exclude. Put your agreement in writing, and be sure to give a copy to the client so that everyone is clear on what the training may or may not accomplish.

Consider modular training. Look at your content and decide whether it's possible to rework your training format. Perhaps you can do two days of training in four half-day sessions instead of two consecutive days. That would give people time to practice and come back to report on their results. If you aren't sure about the effect of splitting up the training, conduct a pilot session and collect feedback. Share the feedback with your client, and make adjustments to the training.

No one knows the value of time more than a trainer. Because of your respect for time and training objectives, it's up to you to work with clients to design training that makes you both happy. With these tips in hand, you'll be able to clearly identify what outcomes your client can expect given time restrictions—and make the most of any quick hit.

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