Training Best Practices:

CLASSROOM DELIVERY TECHNIQUES

Introduction

Whether to learn something completely new or to improve existing skills, classroom training should be 100% focused on providing an environment that will encourage different behaviors on the job. Sometimes someone will give you training material that you are expected to deliver; sometimes you will be able to develop or customize the training material yourself. In any case, there are practices you can follow to deliver training that is learner-focused and performance-based.

The suggestions below are intended for traditional classroom delivery, but many are also applicable for distance-based synchronous training, such as webinars and teleconferences. By "traditional classroom delivery," we mean on-site, face-to-face instruction offered by a trainer or expert. "Distance-based synchronous training" refers to online instruction in which the trainer and learner interact in real time.

Before planning for any classroom training, be sure to reflect on the results from your needs analysis; knowing exactly what your goals are will greatly simplify your work here. The Best Practices document on Needs Assessment can offer some guidance.

Here are strategies and rationales for creating a rewarding classroom experience:

Strategy: Keep Your Goal in Mind

If you do not have a specific destination, you cannot plot a clear path forward, and you certainly cannot communicate that path to your learner. [Dirksen, p.59]

How?

- **Ask yourself** how, specifically, the participants will use what you are telling them.
- **Set learning objectives that aim for what students can do** (not what they will know). For example, the student will be able to perform or explain or some new behavior.
- **Check that all learning aids are in line with the goal.** If not, rethink the purpose of each.

For more on focusing clearly on goals, and developing sound goals, read the Needs Assessment Best Practices guide, which offers strategies for closing the behavior gaps.

Strategy: Meet the Learners Where They Are

Knowing who your learners are and what they want will make both planning and training time more effective for everyone. Meet them where they are and they will be better able to follow your guidance.

How?

- **Whether formally or informally, talk with your learners.** Interview them, if possible. Find out what they want, what they already know, and what their current skill levels are.
- **If participants do not already know each other, consider beginning with brief introductions.** If the group is small (<20) and will be together for more than one day, invite them to say something personal about themselves (e.g., hobbies they enjoy, where they grew up). These connections make for a more open, receptive experience.
- **Icebreakers are a great way to relax participants,** especially if the activity is related to the lesson. Be sure to debrief after the activity and/or refer to it in subsequent lessons. This facilitation will ensure that learners make the connections you want them to see.
- **Your learners know things you don't know,** and they will see the world differently than you do. Make the most of these opportunities in the classroom when they arise. Allowing students to express interesting points of view will make them open to your instruction and might offer guidance you hadn't thought of.
- **If participants already know each other, make sure you understand their relationships.** Is the relationship hierarchical? Experts and novices? Same workplace? Any of these variables can affect the classroom interactions. Adjust classroom arrangements and activities according to these dynamics. For example, you may want to group work teams from the same location together, or you may prefer to purposefully break them up, to allow for sharing of diverse ideas.
- **Configure the room to maximize class participation.** This usually means round tables that seat 6-8 adults. Allow enough space so that the speaker can move around freely. In doing so, be respectful of any cultural expectations or restrictions that might exist.
- **Take advantage of the experience in the room**—let groups of learners take the lead in presenting information. For example, rather than a two-hour lecture to introduce all the vaccine preventable diseases, assign a different disease to each group, provide them guidelines of what to present, and have them 'teach' the class. This is more stimulating for all involved.

Strategy: Set Ground Rules in the Classroom

When students know what to expect, and what boundaries exist, they can relax and learn.

How?

- **Set ground rules at the beginning of the training,** but make this a group activity rather than imposing the rules from "above." This should include keeping on task and a respectful policy regarding cellphones. Post these in writing so they are visible throughout the training. When you refer to them as needed, you can remind participants that they are the ones who set ground rules.
- **Remember that most students want to learn and grow.** They will be happy to know that the rules are aimed at creating a safe learning space.
- **The most common classroom complaint is poor time management.** Design a realistic agenda and do everything you can to keep to it. You must keep your side of the bargain before you can insist that participants keep theirs.

Strategy: Less Is More

New learning environments mean there will be a lot for students to take in beyond the materials at hand. We can only take in so much new information, so "more" is not necessarily better—in fact, it can distract from the focus of the lesson.

How?

- **Resist the temptation to overfill the agenda.** It leaves participants and trainers tired and detracts from the learning. Since the reason for training is to change behavior, it is counterproductive to overemphasize content and underemphasize practice. Try less content, and more practice, to increase learner retention.
- **Leverage pre-reading or pre-work as needed.** It can be a great way to avoid a training that feels like a "knowledge dump" and that instead focuses on hands-on practice. It can also prime learners' minds so they are ready to engage.
- **Identify and focus on the specific knowledge and behavioral gaps** that need to be addressed. Remember that these key issues are what matter most.
- **The "show don't tell" teaching strategy** allows learners to make connections for themselves. When possible, lead students so that they can discover the main ideas without being told.

Strategy: Conduct Post-Training Evaluation

Performance management must be ongoing and cyclical. The first step in maintaining the gains of training is quantifying what the training has accomplished.

How?

- **Step-by-step reviews are critical.** Conduct a short review after each key section, asking learners how they will apply what they learn.
- **Remember—unlearning a habit is much more difficult than learning a new habit.** If you know you are teaching content to correct bad habits, provide lots of opportunities to practice the new skill, and provide a memory jogger for participants to take home, to help reinforce the new behavior. Better yet, have participants create their own memory jogger.
- **For multi-day trainings, have review sessions at the end of each day,** focused on how the participants expect to use what they learn when they return to the workplace. Consider ending the training by having participants develop a simple action plan, detailing one to five specific actions they will take upon returning to the workplace.
- **Include a review activity.** Here is one: "My 10 favorite lessons." Have groups use a flip chart to list the top 10 lessons or tips that they learned, then present to the class. This will provide a solid review and will give you an idea of which lessons were most useful.
- **Ensure participants know about resources for further information.** If appropriate, establish a means for participants to remain connected after the training and to form a support system. Involve the managers in the post-training support as much as possible.
- **Allow students to privately evaluate the training session.** Their anonymous feedback can be especially helpful.

In the Evaluation Best Practices guide, you will find a number of ideas about how best to evaluate training and its ongoing effects (after the training), along with suggestions about what to evaluate and what to do with those evaluation results.

Strategy: Reinforce the Training

Information learned at training will not be optimally retained without regular reinforcement.

How?

Work with your team to make plans for appropriate ongoing check-ins, retraining, or next steps. Be sure that everyone is accountable for these actions and include methods for evaluating the next steps, too.

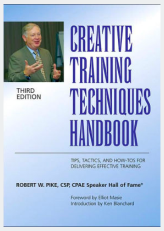
Tip: The Learning Transfer Best Practices guide is an excellent resource for strategies to reinforce training.

Strategy: Avoid Classroom Time Wasters

Time Wasters	Possible Solution
Starting late after a break	Start exactly at the time you indicated. If all participants are not in the room, begin with discussion or review activity.
Starting an activity when participants are confused about what they are supposed to do	Give clear and precise instructions. If the directions are complicated, distribute a written summary in advance and display a slide with instructions.
Writing lecture notes on flip charts while participants watch	Prepare slides or flip charts in advance.
Recording all answers from the group onto a flip chart	Ask a participant to record information as you lead the discussion.
Distributing participant materials individually	Prepare & distribute stapled handouts ahead of time, or ask participants to assist.
Demonstrating every part of a new skill	Show only the parts of the skill that are new or are essential for their understanding of the whole skill. (This assumes that some parts are already known or intuitive enough to master without class time.)
Have every group report back to the class one by one	Ask groups to write key findings on flip chart paper and post on the wall so all can be discussed at the same time, or participants can move around to read what other groups have done. Alternatively, select one group to present and have subsequent groups only mention responses that were not already suggested.
Waiting for volunteers to emerge from the group	Recruit volunteers during breaks, or call on individual participants if there are no immediate volunteers.
Letting discussions drag on too long	Express the need to move on, but be sure to call on those who were cut off. Or begin by stating the time limit and suggesting how many contributions time will permit. Use the parking lot effectively.
Pulling ideas or questions from reluctant participants	Provide a list of questions or ideas and ask participants to select those with which they agree.
Reading the slide content word by word or having a participant read the content of the slide or handout	Focus class discussion on application in the work setting. Provide technical reference materials for later reading.

Adapted from Silberman, Mel. Active Training, 2nd ed. Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer, 1998

Annex 1: Resources



Creative Training Techniques Handbook: Tips, Tactics, and How-To's for Delivering Effective Training
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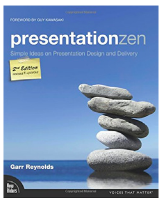

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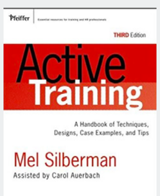

Active Training
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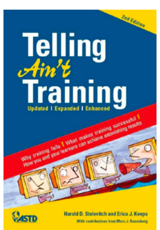

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INTERNET SITES	
Association for Talent Development	www.atd.org
The Bob Pike Group	www.bobpikegroup.com
Training Magazine	https://trainingmag.com