Becoming a great trainer

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Introduction

The traditional roles of trainers and educators are changing and now not only are we presenters and lecturers, but we may be called upon to be a facilitator, moderator, change agent, counselor or instructional designer. In addition to these additional roles, the content we may be asked to facilitate may include mechanical skills, basic math and writing, computer interfacing skills, communication and interpersonal skills, and specialized job skills among others. For these reasons, we must train for the "BIG" picture, and create a high level of "CONCEPTUALIZATION," or an understanding these processes and the audiences' role in them. Not only should we train the X's and O's and standard operating procedures but give them a basic understanding of why these processes are in place, how they relate to the outcomes, and what the consequences of their actions and inactions may be. With many companies experiencing staggering turnover rates by training for the big picture we can empower employers, employees, students and trainees, and create an efficient and productive learning and work environment. This book is written to help trainers, educators and presenters begin that journey by providing a solid foundation for an effective and professional presentation. In this book, we will discuss the logistics of presenting a training program and we will focus on four main categories:

1. Basic presentation skills
2. Creating an environment for learning
3. Building rapport with students and trainees
4. And finally Controlling disruptions

The Basics

First, let's discuss the basics, it is important that you arrive early, set up and test all the equipment, and make sure the lighting and temperature are comfortable for the students. It is important that you use this time to become aware of other room issues such as outside noises, the types of chairs available, seating arrangements, the acoustics of the room, the glare from any Windows or lighting, and even wall and floor coverings that could affect the sound.

Once you have established the location set up and have created a comfortable environment that is conducive to learning and your presentation you will need to focus on a few additional concerns. First, start on time and keep on schedule. You will need to learn to pace your delivery, make sure you cover everything in your presentation, but do not leave excessive time at the end of your presentation, or leave yourself scrambling to cover any remaining information. In today's environment, it is important to introduce yourself to the security and facility personnel at the venue. Make sure you know how to contact them if needed, and that they know how to contact you in the event of unforeseen problems or circumstances. This will build rapport with the staff of the venue and help to provide an efficient and professional event. Be prepared for other disruptions that may occur such as schedule changes, facility problems, technical issues, and acts of God. Other speakers or presenters are unavoidably detained due to weather, illness or other scheduling issues and schedules are subject to change. In addition, various acts of God such as seasonal storms, rain, flooding, snow, and ice may affect the location of your presentation and the ability for the attendees to safely arrive.

Next, let's talk about basic presentation skills. You must be very familiar with the material you will be presenting if you cannot describe it easily or answer questions accurately you may appear unqualified or unprofessional. It is also important to know your audience, become familiar with your audiences' skill sets, education level, any course requirements, and the needs of the organization or association you are addressing. Make sure that you communicate your objectives at the beginning of your presentation. Let them know the basic schedule, scheduled breaks, and the flow of information that you will be presenting to them. When presenting your program and using PowerPoint's, DVDs, or other audiovisual tools do not read directly from the slides and do not rely solely on your materials. Your knowledge and experience are invaluable so use stories, examples and your own experiences to support your presentation. A strong lecturer will capture the students' attention and they will remember the stories and retain the message long after the event is over.

Is also very important that you avoid using excessive slang and never use profanity. With audiences becoming more diverse you may be introduced to different cultures, religions, nationalities, genders and other ideologies, beliefs and perspectives. For these reasons it is important to remember that slang and excessive technical jargon may not be understood by the attendees, and that an ill-timed joke or phrase may be offensive to the people you are addressing. You must **NEVER** say or do anything to offend or embarrass your audience.

Always remember to speak loud enough so all students can hear you and enunciate your words clearly. Master the use of dynamics and inflections to give your presentation character and control the ebb and flow of the emotional experience. Make the audience feel they are attending the event with you and not merely observing you. Be enthusiastic and energetic in your presentation but avoid

distractive mannerisms. Small things such as jingling your keys in your pockets, playing with the microphone, touching your hair, or any untimely pauses, stops, and distractions, as these may make your presentation seem unprofessional. It is also important to maintain eye contact with the audience. When answering questions if you do not know the answer simply acknowledge that and let them know that you will find the answer for them or give them the source so they can find the answer themselves. For most questions the best response is a simple three-step process;

1. Repeat the question or concern as it was presented to you

2. Respond to the question to the best of your ability

3. Review the response to make sure the question or concern was addressed

These simple basic steps will boost your confidence, in the beginning, improve your presentation skills, and provide a solid foundation and starting point for all your future presentations.

Creating an environment for learning

In creating an environment for learning remember that the classrooms and lecture halls are your stage. It is important that you create and maintain a safe and comfortable environment for those attending. Remember that everyone likes to feel safe and secure if you have the room and the environment under control then this will enable the audience to relax, focus, and will greatly aid in the transfer of learning. First introduce yourself, let the students get to know a little about you and learn about their experience and skill level. Some attendees may have more experience than you, so you can learn from that and incorporate that into your presentation. It is up to you to set the initial mood of the group your first few minutes in front of them will influence their initial impression of you. For example, if you appear calm, confident, knowledgeable and have a sense of humor the class will probably be more relaxed and receptive. However, if you appear nervous, tired, stiff or unprofessional this to will influence their initial impression of you and make the transfer of learning more difficult. This is also a great time to motivate your audience, show your passion and dedication, and lay the groundwork for a fun, informative and entertaining presentation. It's important that you know your own strengths and weaknesses as well for example, if you try too hard to overcompensate for lack of knowledge or experience on a certain topic or if you attempt to use humor when that is not your forte this can negatively affect the overall mood of the group. Any information you provide must be specific and accurate, easy to interpret, and concise. This will eliminate any confusion, establish the direction and lay the groundwork for successful presentation. Finally, in creating an environment for learning it is important that you control disruptive participants. There are a few approaches to this which we will discuss later in the book however, your ability to recognize potential issues, distractions, and possible disruptions and attitudes will help you be proactive in providing a safe controlled environment. Remember that we must keep and maintain the moral high ground. Audiences smell fear, they feel your nervousness, and recognize unqualified or inexperienced speakers.

How to build rapport with students and trainees

Audience members and trainees may come from different social and economic backgrounds with varying degrees of skills and experience, but almost every student or employee wants to take part in the process, they want to take ownership of their contributions and know that they can learn and grow from the experience. Many employees, trainees and students take pride in the opportunity to learn new skills, be a contributor and hopefully advance their current position. Training can be an advancement opportunity, a non-financial raise or promotion for the employee and can be a reward, recognition, and acknowledgment for their dedication and support. Unfortunately, if the trainee does not see the value in the training the process becomes an inconvenience to them and without management support, it becomes a valueless experience for the trainee and an added expense for the company. For these reasons, every presentation must be treated and recognized as a value-added service and opportunity for both the company or organization and the trainee.

There are number of ways to build rapport with the audience. First, don't pretend to know all the answers, if you don't have an answer discuss it with the class or research the question and respond when possible. Involve the audience members and ask questions, often the answer you need may be in the classroom. Remember that your audience has various levels of knowledge and experience as well so don't be afraid to ask. A great way to build rapport with your audience simply by making yourself available. If they feel they can approach you with a problem, a question, observation or concern it will greatly improve the two-way communication between you and the audience, build trust and increase their sense of ownership as a stakeholder in the learning process. In doing so you must always treat all students and audience members with respect. In many settings the students, audience members or trainees may look up to you, respect you and recognize you as a trusted leader or source. In addition, we must avoid stereotypes, we as presenters and the audience members are all human. We all have attitudes, beliefs, and life experiences, and while this is normal we cannot allow these to become a distraction or roadblock to building rapport with her audience. Finally, probably the simplest way to build rapport with an audience that I've found is to not be afraid to laugh at yourself. If you make a mistake or an unexpected issue arises acknowledge it, laugh about it and move on. We all make mistakes, we all get a little ahead of ourselves, and we all have periodic bouts with silliness. Laugh at yourself along with the audience, find humor in the audience's responses and don't be afraid to let everyone share in the silliness for a minute. Finally, supplement your presentation with real-world examples and stories from your experiences. Frequently a good story or anecdote will capture the audience's attention and they will remember the stories and retain the knowledge long after your presentation.

Controlling disruptions

We must treat the classroom or lecture hall as a living breathing organism. It is important to monitor the climate of the class being aware of possible attitudes, issues, and environmental conditions that may negatively affect our presentation. While we must take charge and maintain control we must also maintain the moral high ground. Often we are the captain of the ship and it is our responsibility to meet the objectives of the organization, buyer or institution. This balancing act can be challenging at first as we strive to create an entertaining, informative and productive event, but there are simple ways that we can address disruptions. First of all, and probably the easiest way is to walk out into the class or briefly set among the audience as you lecture. More often than not this will discourage and get the attention of any distracted, chatty or disinterested audience members. Occasionally you will have a student or an attendee that feels the need distract and disrespect you, the event or other audience members. It is important that you do not get defensive as mentioned earlier we must take charge, maintain control and maintain the moral high ground. Frequently humor is a great tool in defusing possible situations and a quick joke or timely pause can eliminate the problem. Never address disruptive audience members negatively however, it may become necessary to remind them of your credentials and why we are all there. If needed give the group a break and have a private discussion with the individual or simply asked the student to step into the hallway or another room to discuss and resolve the issue. In today's climate it is important that we take an active role in maintaining the safety and security of our audiences. It is always advisable to arrive to any new venue early, introduce yourself to on-site security and find out how to get in touch with them and other responsible parties in the event they are needed. As a last resort you may need to ask unruly and disruptive audience members to leave or have them removed, and in a worst-case scenario you may need to involve security in this process.

So far in discussing disruptions we've considered disruptive participants and possible security issues, however, we must also consider scheduling issues, facility issues, and other acts of God that may interrupt, influence, delay or postpone your presentation. For these reasons as well, it is important to arrive early, meet with the event coordinator to verify the schedule, verify that your technology is working correctly and that there are no facility or equipment issues that could hamper your presentation.

Conclusion

This is a unique time in the educational and training fields, for the first time we have multigenerational classes and audiences. These generations learn in different manners with different technologies and at different paces. Some of the focus has shifted to the phenomenon of social learning or simply learning from each other, and just in time or embedded learning. With new technologies such as phones, computers, tablets and wearables trainers and educators must work harder to match the content and delivery methods to support this new environment.

The business environment is changing is becoming one of social enterprise and entrepreneurialism. We are now seeing the rise and revival of small businesses, family-owned businesses, and businesses with a purpose. More and more companies and organizations large and small are outsourcing training with the focus on training for business development. This is part of the third-party provider and outsourcing revolution with a focus on just in time learning and the essential information required for the learner to be productive and efficient. Institutions, organizations and training providers must be aware of this and monitor this trend. Just as our economy has turned almost entirely to a customer-driven economy and a pull ideology, so will education and the training industry follow. It is up to us to consider each class, speech or presentation a value-added service and an event. In the future education and training will need to not only be functional and productive but entertaining, and as more companies, institutions, and industries join this revolution it will certainly become competitive and it will be up to you to lead the way.