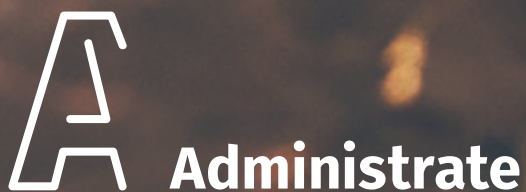


How to Deliver Better Training

Tips for Training Providers
Best of the Blog

2016



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Contributors

Richard Cassidy

Julie Morgan

Kim Morrison

John Peebles

Egle Petrauskaite

ADMINISTRATE TEAM

Irek Atroszko

Conrad Barrett-Freeman

Chris Beswick

Atanas Laskov

Adam Medley

Tom Morton

Ruairi Mouat

Mark Mullen

Daniel Stanoescu



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Introduction

One of my favourite things to do is talk to customers. Since 2011 I've had the privilege of being able to talk to our customers all over the world, and in some cases I even get to travel and meet up with them in person. It's a really humbling experience to interact with someone who is running their entire operation on software that your company provides, and we really value these interactions. But they're not just fact finding excursions designed to help us improve our product - in every case I come away inspired by the stories I hear, the relationships, the ideas, and the energy exhibited.

I always hang up the phone (or leave for the airport) brimming with new ideas, determined

to improve, and thankful for our customers. And so we thought, why not share a bit of this experience with you? Over the past year we've been interviewing a wide variety of customers and getting their thoughts on how they got started, how they run their business, tips they have for others, and the things they've learned. I'm really excited to share these interviews with you in our upcoming eBook Training Providers at Work. Make sure you don't miss it by registering for it here.

For now, enjoy a roundup of the best articles and training tips from our blog for the first half of 2014. We hope you enjoy it and as always, we'd love to hear from you!

Sincerely,
John J Peebles, CEO



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Read it on
Our Blog

Setting SMART Goals for Students and Employees

Teaching students to set goals for themselves is not a skill that is typically taught in most educational situations, yet it is a valuable life long discipline. Most managers will agree that in order to be successful one must begin with the end in mind. Both students and employees can therefore benefit from learning how to set goals. The old adage of “if you fail to plan, you plan to fail!” rings true, and we recommend making sure anyone taking a course have a goal or desired outcome that they can work towards accomplishing.

Clear goals should have ways to track progress, both for motivation and for accountability. Your students should be able to periodically check in with themselves or others and see how they are doing in meeting their goal.

SET SMART GOALS

A helpful guide to setting goals is found within the acronym SMART. Teach your students to use these guidelines when developing goals. SMART goals are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-Bound.

Specific

Goals need to be well defined and easy to understand. General goals are not helpful and can cause confusion or create a lack of motivation. Another person should be able to read a goal and know exactly what will be accomplished. Specific goals will usually answer the five “W” questions (Who, What, When, Where, and Why).



Setting SMART Goals for Students and Employees

Example:

I want to get in shape, so I will run a marathon with Bob, in Boston, on July 21st.

This example answers our five “W” questions and can be understood by anyone. It’s also key to understand that getting in shape is a goal. In the event that this specific goal isn’t met, you can still meet the “getting in shape” part by running a different marathon, or by switching to a different sport in the case of injury or some other factor.

Measurable

Clear goals should have ways to track progress, both for motivation and for accountability. Your students should be able to periodically check in with themselves or others and see how they are doing in meeting their goal. Good measurable goals often answer questions such as:

- How Much?
- How Many?
- How will I know when it’s accomplished?

Example:

I will follow Hal Higdon’s marathon training schedule each week, and look to finish the marathon in under 4:30.

This provides us two areas for measurement – our weekly training plan, where we can see if we’re following the training regimen, and an outcome that will be measured as well. This is often an area where people fail when goal setting in that they put “getting in shape” as their specific goal, but they don’t actually have any way of measuring their relative fitness, for example.

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Attainable

It is important to choose goals that are realistic. Setting goals that are not achievable will only cause frustration and failure, undermining any future attempts.

Example:

I am physically able to run and have the time in my schedule to train appropriately.

Lack of measurement can also lead to failure to attain the goal as you don't have any way of measuring your progress. Demoralisation can occur and even if you remain motivated, you miss the value of being able to create a positive feedback loop by looking over your measurements and seeing yourself move closer to attaining your goal.

Example:

Training for a marathon mirrors my lifestyle choice of being healthy and active, and is something I have always wanted to do.

Relevant

Encourage students or employees to choose goals that are important to them and relevant to their work or interests. This will encourage success more so than if they work at something that they are not passionate about. In a work or education setting, goals can often require teamwork and support from a variety of different people – making sure that each person involved feels that the goal is relevant to them is important for achieving success.

Time-Bound

Similar to being measurable, every goal needs a time frame. This helps you stay focused and committed. Long range or complicated goals should have interim deadlines in order to keep things on track and objectively evaluate your progress.

Example:

I will run the marathon this year.

Note we've already added specificity to which marathon we're targeting above, but it's worthwhile framing the goal a bit in case we change which marathon we're targeting (the specifics) in light of still achieving our overall goal.

It is important to develop goals with your employees and students. You as teacher or manager will have a unique perspective and can guide or shape their choices. Not only will your involvement keep things on track, it will also communicate to your students that you are invested in their education or work. Here's a printable worksheet for developing SMART goals that you can use!



Here are some questions you should make sure are contemplated:

- Does this seem worthwhile or valuable?
- Is this the appropriate time?
- Does this complement our other efforts or respond to our other needs?
- Are you the right person or is your team the right team?
- Is this applicable in the current socio-economic or technical environment?





Read it on
Our Blog

How to Get the Most Out of a Conference or Trade Show

Attending a trade show is an expensive and time consuming event, and we want to help you make the most out of it. Even if you're not visiting us in London or San Diego, use these techniques to help you get the most out of the next trade show or conference you attend.

BEFORE THE SHOW

Make Three Lists

Planning your visit will really go a long way, and doesn't take nearly as much time as you'd think. To effectively plan how you're going to use your time, make sure you have the show's directory of exhibitors at hand, a schedule of speakers, and a rough idea of how much time you'll have available each day.

We recommend scanning the speaker listings on topics that interest you and narrowing things down to a short list. Even if you have your heart set on one particular vendor you might find yourself surprised once you interact with their staff or see their product first hand.

1. Goals

What's the primary reason you're attending? Are you hoping to learn something? Solve a problem? Network with other like minded individuals? Get inspired? It's helpful to sketch out one or two overriding goals you'll have for each show or conference you attend. Whenever possible, quantify these goals.

For example:

if you've identified networking as one of your main goals, set a target for how many relationships you'll come away with. This will help motivate you, spur you into action, and review your progress each day. Beware of setting too many goals – it's best to focus on one thing.

2. Exhibitors

Scan through the exhibitor directory (if there will be exhibitors). If you've got any major vendor decisions coming up, it's best to make sure you interact with your potential vendors as much as possible. We recommend visiting those vendors you're interested in along with their competitors. Even if you have your heart set on one particular vendor you might find yourself surprised once you interact with their staff or see their product first hand. Ask them who their competition is if you're having trouble determining this, and ask them for a fair assessment of how they stack up. By checkin in on a variety of potential vendors, you can save yourself from making a bad decision or reinforce a good decision. Meeting with a company in person will tell you a lot about them and should only help you with your decision making.

3. Speakers

Listening to great speakers can be an inspiring, life changing experience when they're great, and a frustrating waste of time when they aren't. We recommend scanning the speaker listings on topics that interest you and narrowing things down to a short list. For each person you're thinking of seeing, try searching for them on youtube or the internet to see a video of them talking. If they're good, then you should be excited about what's



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to come. If they're bad, you can save yourself from a waste of time. It's often good to get out of your comfort zone a little as well and attend talks given by really good speakers who may be addressing an area you're not very familiar with. A great communicator will be able to teach you while keeping your interest and you may find a new interest or broaden your understanding of an unfamiliar topic simply by choosing to listen to the best speakers.



Plan Your Route

Now that you have your three lists, you should be able to check out the floor plan of the show and plan a general route of movement through the exhibit hall. Make sure to note where the bathrooms are, what entrances you might use, and how you'll get to any rooms to listen to speakers. Planning your route in advance might seem a bit tedious, but it can be extremely helpful when walking a huge show floor, and you can always adjust your plan to respond to the unforeseen.

Book a Massage

We recommend booking a massage if your event lasts more than a single day. Most people aren't used to standing and walking all day, and that's essentially what you'll be doing at a trade show. They can be exhausting and a nice massage will both relax you and help you get through subsequent days feeling much better. If you struggle with back pain or any other kind of ongoing issue related to posture, this can really make a difference. Most hotels will be able to help you book a massage – call them and see what they have on offer!

Bring your Own Bag

Trade shows will provide you with a complimentary bag stuffed full of marketing materials and other swag, but we recommend bringing your own bag that you know you can carry comfortably the entire day. Backpacks can prevent

arm and shoulder fatigue while still providing plenty of space and your neck and arms will thank you!

Book Your Travel and Accommodation Early

The earlier you book, the closer to the convention centre you'll be, and the more money you'll save. While you may be tempted to opt for cheaper hotels that aren't affiliated with the conference, make sure you accurately account for all the costs involved – unaffiliated hotels may not have a conference shuttle, might charge you for extras like wifi or breakfast, and can be in locations that are harder to get to. You might also miss out on valuable after hours networking in the lobby or bar if you're staying off the beaten path. While good deals can sometimes be had, just make sure saving twenty bucks a night isn't cancelled out by the need for a rental car!

AT THE SHOW

Wear Comfortable Shoes

This one should be a no brainer, but you'd be surprised! Many attendees can expect to walk several miles over the course of a normal day at a conference, so we highly suggest you only consider bringing your most comfortable shoes. If you can manage it, pack two or more pairs and



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change out your shoes every day to give your feet some variety. Plan to take breaks to sit down and rest your feet throughout the day.



Collect the Information You Need

Make sure you get the information you need from those vendors on your plan. Many exhibitors will offer to email you their materials to save you lugging it all home.

Ditch Information You Don't

There's no rule that says you need to hang on to everything you're given. Most exhibitions will have plenty of opportunities to throw away unwanted marketing materials or swag.

Bring a Notepad

You'll want something to take notes with during the conference. Whether it's jotting down notes during a great talk, making sure you cover your todos, or simply taking notes after you visit the key vendors on your list, you'll be glad you had something to write on. We recommend snapping up a nice (yet cheap) soft cover notepad that can fit in your back pocket so it's always with you.

Take Breaks

You're going to need breaks throughout the day. Find some spots to sit down and visit them every now and then.

Drink plenty of fluids and make sure you don't overdo it.

Leave 30 Minutes Early

Try to leave a bit early so you don't get caught up in the closing time crush. Shuttles, cab stands, and walkways will all be mobbed right at closing time so we recommend planning to take off just a bit early or stopping to enjoy a cup of coffee while you wait for the crowds to diminish. Make sure you book a table at whatever restaurant you want to eat at as well – big shows will really cause local dining wait times to skyrocket without a reservation.

Enjoy a Massage or Bath


Did you book that massage? If so, enjoy it! If not the next best option is taking a bath. It'll help you sleep better and wake up refreshed.

FOLLOWING UP

After the show make sure you follow up with the vendors you're interested in. Some companies will struggle to handle all of the leads they obtain and it can take awhile if you're waiting on them to initiate contact. It's a good idea to connect with new contacts on LinkedIn or send them a short email with a relevant detail about yourself in case they can't remember your name. Lastly, if you really enjoyed a speaker, make sure you let them know – you'd be surprised at how much this means to speakers no matter how successful they are.

Trade shows and conferences can be tiring and expensive, but they can also be inspiring and a valuable avenue to acquire new contacts, products, and services. We hope you enjoyed this guide, and hope to see you at an event sometime this year!



A high-angle photograph of a person wearing a blue short-sleeved button-down shirt, sitting at a dark wooden desk. Their arms are crossed, and they are wearing a watch on their left wrist. In the foreground, a white keyboard and a black smartphone are visible on the desk. The background is a light-colored wooden floor.

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Read it on
Our Blog

The Need for Reflection When Teaching

It is easy for teachers to spend so much time and energy focused on their students' progress that they forget to consider their own performance. Self reflection can be a valuable tool that helps make you aware of how you are teaching, which in turn makes you a better teacher. Teaching without reflection is teaching blind – without any knowledge of effectiveness.

“By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is noblest; Second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest.” - Confucius

It can be difficult and time consuming for teachers to scrutinize their performance, but like any other occupation it is essential for improvement. Asking deliberate questions, reflecting on the answers, then implementing changes on how you approach your teaching based on your reflection differentiates decent teachers from great teachers.

WHEN TO REFLECT

Ideally, you should be reflecting and thinking about your teaching throughout the day. This can be difficult for inexperienced teachers who are focused on delivering content, classroom management and assessing students during a class. The more familiar and comfortable you are with these elements, the easier self reflection while teaching

will become. Being able to see how well (or how poorly) a lesson is being received and make adjustments is one sign of a reflective teacher.

To get started, make a point to consider each class after it is completed. Jot down notes or keep a reflection journal of how the class went or ask some of the questions in the following section. You should think about which aspects of a class were successful and which could be improved upon. Collect these notes throughout the day or after every training session, think on them for a few minutes while jotting them down, and then set aside some time at the end or beginning of every week to reflect. Reflecting on your collated notes for just 15 minutes a week can often provide huge value, particularly when you're dealing with a new or challenging course.

HOW TO REFLECT

Ask Questions

Create a list of questions to ask for each class or training session. Some examples include:



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- How did my students respond to that lesson?
- Was there meaningful student involvement?
- What aspects of the class were positive? Negative?
- Are my students willing to take risks?
- What evidence is there of students learning?
- Are my students working cooperatively with others?
- Was I giving enough wait time?
- What should I do differently tomorrow?

Videotape Yourself

Video taping yourself one will take a bit longer, but can be really valuable. Explain to your students that you are focusing on improving your teaching and set up a camera to film a class. Make sure that you get permission from your students in advance, and preferably in writing –

“I am a writer of books in retrospect. I talk in order to understand; I teach in order to learn.” – Robert Frost

depending on camera placement, you shouldn't need to get any students in your video, just yourself. Watching yourself teach will provide valuable insight about your body language, nonverbal cues, speaking habits and how you respond to students.

Be Observed

Arrange for another teacher to observe your class and offer feedback. It may help to give them specific areas to watch for, such as how well you ask questions or respond to behavior problems. Reciprocate by observing your peer and see what you can learn from another teacher! You'll be surprised by how much this can help, we promise. There's nothing that will elevate your craft better than having a trusted peer evaluate your performance.

Brainstorm With Other Teachers

If you are struggling with a certain aspect of teaching, bounce ideas off of a colleague. Often another perspective will assist you in solving the problem or thinking creatively. It is especially helpful to collaborate with others who teach the same course.

Ask Your Students

Gather feedback on your teaching from the ones who are most comfortable with it – your students! Don't wait until the end of a course to hear their opinions, ask frequently. Create activities where they can constructively criticise your teaching. It may be beneficial to have these be anonymous so the students will feel free to be honest.

MAKE (AND TAKE) TIME TO THINK & REFLECT

Most importantly, you need to make and take the time to think through the feedback you've created and collected for yourself. We know that schools, homes, and busy training centres can be noisy and it's often difficult to find a quiet place devoid of distractions, but if you can find a quiet place and fifteen minutes or so of uninterrupted time, you'll be more successful in your reflection efforts. If you can't try to get to a coffee shop, teacher's lounge, or even your car (although it's best to have a desk or table to lay out your notes) where you won't be interrupted, then use



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a concentration app to help create some ambient noise which will help you focus. Here's a list of five good ambient noise apps for a variety of platforms that are built to help with concentration.

Now that you're in a spot where you can do some reflection, take a look at your notes, feedback, video, student responses, or questions that you've collected throughout the previous week, and observe them. Try to find a common theme or thread. Don't focus on specifics, but instead try to observe patterns that prevail across multiple days or classes (or even weeks). Many times these will be positive reflections, and that's great, but sometimes they'll be negative, or something that needs to improve. Don't get discouraged if you're feeling like things are going well. Simply make a list of these trends, then take a few minutes to think of some ways you can tackle these




Try to find a common theme or thread. Don't focus on specifics, but instead try to observe patterns that prevail across multiple days or classes (or even weeks). Many times these will be positive reflections, and that's great, but sometimes they'll be negative, or something that needs to improve.

items. Often you won't be able to change everything right away, but chipping away at issues and making incremental progress can really add up over the course of a few months, semester, or a year. Even if you have several things you'd like to improve, try to focus on no more than one or two items each week. Remember to share your reflections with a trusted coworker, spouse, partner, or teacher as you go along and value their input.

CONCLUSION

Reflecting on your teaching practices should not just be about finding mistakes or harping on negative aspects. Look for positive things and celebrate them! Then, choose one or two areas where you can improve and work on those systematically. No teacher is perfect and everyone has room for improvement, but if you fail to see where you can improve then you never will.



A person is seen from behind, standing on a wooden pier. They are wearing a dark, long-sleeved jacket and dark trousers. The background is a vast, misty landscape with a body of water in the foreground and rolling hills or mountains in the distance. The lighting is soft and diffused, suggesting an overcast day or early morning. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

Most importantly, you need to make and take the time to think through the feedback you've created and collected for yourself.

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How to Save Hundreds of Hours with Automated Emails



Read it on
Our Blog

We believe that communication with customers is one of the most important thing when running a business, but this rule doubly applies when running a training operation. Whether you're a higher education institution, commercial training provider, or a trainer that primarily does in-house and on-site instruction, communication around the classroom is just as important as within. Still, communication is time consuming, expensive, and fraught with operational headache, so many of us don't spend nearly as much time on it as we should.

But what if you could reclaim hundreds of hours over the

Many of our customers have setup automated email triggers that provide more information to their students than they did before now that they don't have to worry about the time impact.

course of a month, or even dozens of hours each week and communicate better? By automating most of the routine communication they have with their students, many of our customers have done just that! And while saving time is great, most are now able to deliver a superior service by increasing the amount and frequency of information that is delivered to their students and staff in a timely manner.

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TWO TYPES OF EMAIL

Most of our customers can separate their email communications into two groups: those that have to happen no matter what according to a schedule, and those that are in response to specific questions. The first group of emails can be extremely time consuming to manage and can create a lot of stress for your organisation if you've got lots of students attending lots of courses. We're interested in helping our customers solve the first issue – routine emails delivering the same information to different students should not be a drag on your daily schedule.

Email Still Dominates

Email remains the dominant form of communication and is preferred over other methods by customers, particularly



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for important emails like course invoices, registration confirmations, and joining instructions. If you're not leveraging this channel today, you're at a disadvantage!

ARE YOU USING THE RIGHT TOOL?

For most training organisations, sending emails to students (and staff) is difficult and extremely time consuming, mainly due to not having the right tool for the job. Most email tools on the market today focus on email marketing, not repetitive email communications with customers. These marketing tools are focused on "one-to-many" communications where the same exact email goes to everyone in the group as opposed to "one-to-one" communications where the same email template goes to an individual, with their specific details filled in. This leaves training providers in a bind – they provide (or should provide) lots of communication to their customers around a standard service. In order to get these messages out, most training providers spend lots of time on manual mail merges, or worse, manual effort spent on sending each individual email!

AUTOMATED EMAIL TRIGGERS FROM ADMINISTRATE



"I'm a great believer that any tool that enhances communication has profound effects in terms of how people can learn from each other, and how they can achieve

the kind of freedoms that they're interested in." – Bill Gates
This is why we've spent time to build the right tool for the right job, what we call the "Communication Triggers" within Administrate, designed to help you setup template emails according to a schedule, automatically send them with the right information automatically filled in, and track their delivery.

How Much Time Could You Save?

How much time could you save by automating your course related emails? It could be dozens of hours each week, or hundreds of hours every year. If this sounds like a lot, keep reading to see the breakdown of time required to manage routine training emails.

Are You Manually Sending Emails?

Lets imagine a normal training operation, running ten courses per week, with ten students each. We recommend that training providers touch their customer five to seven times while delivering education.

- Booking Confirmation – "Thanks for Booking!"
- Invoice with Payment Confirmation - "Payment Successfully Processed!"
- Joining Instructions – "Your Course Details"
- Course Reminder, Week Prior – "Reminder: Your Course Next Week"
- Course Reminder, Day Prior – "Details For Tomorrow"
- Certificate Delivery – "Here's Your Certificate!"
- Certificate Expiration Checkin, Upon Expiration – "Your First Aid Certificate is About to Expire!"

Sometimes trainers combine some of these emails or skip one, but in general you can separate your responsibility into three phases: confirmation, reminding, and followup. All three of these phases are critical to making your operation successful!

Back to our example – if you send these seven communications to each student you encounter, the time can really add up. Below we've worked out two example, one

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that assumes you can send an email every three minutes. Remember, even if you're really organised, you still have to get through the following workflow in just a couple of minutes:

- Remember to send the email (difficult unless you set a lot of reminders or run a lot of reports)
- Dig out your template you've saved (you have one, right?)
- Fill in all the blanks from your CRM or excel spreadsheets
- Grab the correct email address, copy and paste to avoid making mistakes!
- Quickly double check for errors
- Send the email (lets hope it doesn't bounce!)

Could you do all of that 700 times, and average under 3 minutes per email?

An Example:

10 Courses
x 10 Students
x 7 Emails
x 3 Minutes
= 2,100 Minutes (35 Hours)

10 Courses
x 10 Students
x 7 Emails
x 1 Minute
= 700 Minutes (11+ Hours)

Are You Using Mail Merge or Mailchimp?

Many training providers use a mail merge or email service provider like Mailchimp to send their emails out. Don't get us wrong, these tools are great for the odd email send or for your marketing activities, but they're not the best tools for sending lots of personalised emails on a predefined schedule. Email service providers are designed to send the same email to everyone, and mail merges can provide

specific personalised information to a group, but can't be sent automatically or according to a schedule!

Just like above, here's a typical Mail Merge or Email Service Provider workflow:

- Remember to send the email
- Dig out your template, with merge codes or tags already filled in
- Assemble the required data in an excel spreadsheet, and double check to make sure everything looks right
- Perform the merge, and send the email (hope nothing bounces!)

We think it's not unreasonable to expect to spend at roughly fifteen minutes per mail merge (or mail chimp) email, including the time spent testing how things will look and making sure you've got the right list from your CRM.

For Example:

10 Courses
x 7 Emails
x 15 Minutes
= 1,050 Minutes (17+ Hours)

10 Courses
x 7 Emails
x 10 Minutes
= 700 Minutes (11+ Hours)

THERE'S A BETTER WAY – AUTOMATE YOUR EMAILS!

Our customers use Administrate to handle all of this for them. Our training management software never forgets to send an email, always follows the defined template, and even lets you know if something goes wrong!

The way it works is simple:

- Customers setup email templates for the emails they want to send. Templates can be fully customised using HTML and you can include standard attachments if you'd like.



How to Save Hundreds of Hours with Automated Emails

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- They define a delivery schedule. For example, they can define that course reminders are sent 2 days before the course is scheduled to start.
- Administrate sends the emails and tracks the receipt, whether the customer opens the email, and whether they click on any links you've included. If you've ever used email marketing software, the same kind of tracking information is available through Administrate! Any errors that occur during delivery are shown, and you can edit and resend emails as necessary if an email address is wrong, for example.

Communicate More

Many of our customers have setup automated email triggers that provide more information to their students than they did before now that they don't have to worry about the time impact. This provides better visibility to their customers, saves time for the training organisation, and improves the overall experience relative to other trainers in the marketplace. Today Administrate helps send over 50,000 emails each month on behalf of our customers, and as more embrace this feature, we're delighted to see a steady increase in usage!

Communicate Better

Our customers have taken the time to design email templates that look nice, work well on mobile devices, and include much more information that they would have previously contained now that the entire system is automated.


CONCLUSION



The automated email feature is included as part of the normal Administrate product offering. Our training management system is designed to help training administrators save time and deliver a better experience for

their students, and we're proud of how our communications triggers help our customers. To read more about this feature, check out our blog post announcing the arrival of our communication triggers or our support documentation, and if you'd like to see our software first hand, make sure you sign up for a free trial!





For most training organisations, sending emails to students (and staff) is difficult and extremely time consuming, mainly due to not having the right tool for the job. Most email tools on the market today focus on email marketing, not repetitive email communications with customers.



Read it on
Our Blog

How to Encourage Student Participation

Student participation not only adds interest to a course, it also provides a way for you to promote active learning and assess understanding. As we've known for thousands of years, active learning will produce better outcomes for your students, but it will also be more interesting for you as a teacher.

While it's common for only a few people to speak up in a group, especially a large class, there are plenty of simple ways to help break down this natural barrier and get your students participating. Below we discuss seven methods to help you to foster an environment where all students know what is expected of them and feel comfortable participating.

Once class is over, review which students actively participated. Consider if there are students who need more encouragement to interact in future classes, and make a point to draw them into the discussion in the next class or two.

1. PLAN AHEAD

There are many ways to teach a course: lecture, discussion, or cooperative learning are just a few. When planning your course, you'll need to determine which teaching method you'll primarily use and how student participation will be integrated. Not every class will need to be the same, but knowing

which method you prefer will help you determine your expectations for student participation.

2. LEARN NAMES

You'll be surprised at how much this impacts student participation, even in professional training settings that are more transient than traditional classrooms. Anonymity is a subtle drag on participation, and students who feel more connected to you and their classmates and less anonymous will participate more. If you can't manage to learn the names of your students quickly enough, have name placards that are large enough for you to read, and make sure the students use them by placing them where you can see them. The simple act of referencing a student by name could be all you need to spark much improved participation.



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3. SET THE TONE

Your students need to know what you expect when it comes to their participation. Explain what you envision for the course and how you would like for them to respond during class time. Do you welcome questions and comments throughout the class or only at certain times? Will you allow time for cooperative learning and group work? Are students going to be graded for their participation, or lack thereof? All of these things should be clearly addressed in the beginning of your course.

It is also important to lay some ground rules about what you expect within student interactions. Depending on the age and maturity level of your class, this can be brief or extensive. Simple guidelines such as being respectful, letting people finish without being interrupted and staying on topic are often sufficient.

It's also worth examining your body language to make sure that you appear welcoming to questions and participation. For example, don't stand behind the lectern or podium while teaching, as this sends the message that you don't want to be interrupted. Rather, make a habit of walking out into the classroom and asking questions while you teach. This will send a clear message that learning is the goal, and you're embarking on that journey with your class, not leading them along.

4. DIVIDE YOUR CLASS INTO GROUPS

Every now and then divide the class into small groups, and have them tackle a short problem together. Students who know each other will participate better in a larger classroom setting, and for those students who are intimidated by larger groups, a smaller setting can give them an opportunity to provide input and interact with peers. If you keep the problems they're engaging short and limited to answering one or two questions, for example, you can have run through a mini group session in just a few minutes. Have the groups report back orally in front of the larger class, write their responses on the board, and then discuss them together.



5. HAVE STUDENTS "WRITE IN" THEIR COMMENTS

Some students, particularly those in larger classroom settings, will be less eager to contribute, or will feel like they can't think very well on their feet. To help engage these students, pose a question or set of problems just like you would do in a group setting, but have students write down their answers on a notecard. Collect the cards and randomly read out a few answers for debate by the broader class. Ask the author of the card to provide clarity if needed, or additional comments.

6. LISTEN AND RESPOND APPROPRIATELY

Make sure you create an atmosphere that is consistent with your initial message. To do this, be aware of how you are responding to your students. Both verbal and non-verbal cues will either encourage students to participate or intimidate them. Make eye contact with students while they are speaking, and also use eye contact to encourage the quiet students. You will probably have several talkative students who tend to dominate the conversation so try to draw others in by asking them what they think. You may also need to gently ask the more vocal students to hold back occasionally to let other people have an opportunity to speak.

Allow wait time after asking a question, for at least thirty seconds. Be comfortable with silence! Eventually someone



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will speak up. Don't interrupt when people are speaking, or allow students to interrupt each other. There will be times when a person responds with incorrect information but even then, let them finish their thoughts. Let those situations be learning opportunities by using questioning or redirection to arrive at the correct answer.

There are ways to hint to students that their initial answer might not be quite right without making them feel like they made a mistake. Ask them to "qualify their thoughts" or ask them to "keep going" or mention they're "not quite there, but what about X". It's often helpful to know the material well enough so that when a wrong answer is posed you can talk about how "person X in the field agreed with you" so they know their mistake was common. Refer back to comments or questions from students to show that you are listening and thinking about what they have to say. Above all, read the room – if you know your students well, you'll quickly find out who can take criticism, a little good natured ribbing, and who might be afraid to participate and should be treated more gently.

7. DEBRIEF

Once class is over, review which students actively participated. Consider if there are students who need more encouragement to interact in future classes, and make a point to draw them into the discussion in

the next class or two. This can be done by asking them a direct question or in the case of extremely shy students, mentioning to them before or after class that you'd like to hear what they have to say.

CONCLUSION

A lot of the effort to get students participating relies on you, the trainer, educator, and teacher. Make sure you set the tone and start your classes down the right path by using these techniques consistently. Although it may seem like extra effort, the results will be worth it, and once your class understands what you expect from them, they'll begin participating regularly without effort from you. Lastly, your students will get more out of the class and be better prepared due to your efforts!



There are ways to hint to students that their initial answer might not be quite right without making them feel like they made a mistake. Ask them to “qualify their thoughts” or ask them to “keep going” or mention they’re “not quite there, but what about X”.



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How to Help Employees Embrace Continuous Learning



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Our Blog

Continuous learning at work has never been more important. In fact, it's not just important, it's imperative if you want to grow as a business.

It helps your organisation tap into the full potential of your employees, but it also helps them tap into their full potential as people.

For your employees, studying the latest trends, undertaking research and constantly learning new information allows them to come up with new and innovative ideas which should collectively translate into a competitive edge for your business.

All of this should be a no-brainer. Any company with big ambitions needs a workforce that is geared towards challenging itself and going from strength to strength. So why is continuous learning so hard? Why do some many organisations struggle to keep their employees current and learning throughout their careers?

The main reason is that creating a continuous learning environment isn't a process problem, it's a cultural shift that requires management to actively work towards fostering a culture of continuous learning across the company. Top performing companies have a deep understanding



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of the importance of continuous learning within their organisations.

It's easy to say that any real change has to begin with the management, but culture changes (particularly those involving learning and development) in particular have to start from the top. To be effective, you have to be convinced of the importance of the change and be clear about the benefits. Along the way you will need smart and knowledgeable managers who are bought into the goal and familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of their teams to come up with learning suggestions pertinent to them.



If you're thinking that you know all this already and have come across similar advice many times before, here are some suggestions to help you move from knowing to doing. Here's how you encourage continuous learning in your employees, and thus give yourself the best possible chance to set your company up for long-term and sustainable success.

DEFINE LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND GOALS

There's a lot to learn. But only a fraction of what's available out there is pertinent to your specific goals. Even within your niche, the learning needs of your staff will differ drastically from team to team. As part of the

process of implementing these changes, you need to be very clear about the direction you want each of your teams to progress in, and accordingly devise strategies to make this happen. You may not have to define an entire curriculum, but you do need to know what you're aiming for with regards to outcomes.

Important questions you need to ask yourself:

- What exactly do you want your teams to learn?
- How much time can you afford to spend training?
- How much money are you willing to spend training?
- Is this going to be an ongoing commitment?
- What are you hoping continuous learning will do for your teams?
- What competitive edge do you want them to gain from it?

Not all teams need to be learning all the time, but some will need to invest in education much more than others. For example, if you run a company that creates mobile phone apps, you certainly need your engineers and creative designers to do a lot of on-the-job reading and learning. If you're in another field that changes at a more predictable (or slower) pace like accounting, you can probably rely on quarterly or annual updates.

At the end of the day, it's up to you to decide what the learning you have in mind for your staff will look like and how it will benefit your business.

MAKE RESOURCES FOR LEARNING AVAILABLE

Don't expect your staff to read work-related material in their leisure time, like on the weekends or after going home. That's not going to happen. People lead full lives, and your creative people especially need to switch off completely in order to be productive the next day.

Rather than fight an uphill battle against human nature, focus on incorporating reading and learning sessions into normal office hours. You can ask your teams, depending on their roles and job responsibilities, to spend an hour or two



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every few days towards this end. You will also need to ensure that you don't swamp them with so much work that they aren't able to find any time for this much-needed reading. Make sure they have the time as well as a good Internet connection for this purpose. If they need to join a library for weekly trips, encourage them to do so and subsidise their memberships. See if there are any courses that they can attend to improve their skills and knowledge.

However, you need to give them clear directions about what you want them to be reading and learning about.

Learning is a time-consuming process. And if you aren't clear about what you want your staff to achieve from it, you could be wasting precious company hours asking your people to browse the Internet on vague or irrelevant things.

Don't expect your staff to read work-related material in their leisure time, like on the weekends or after going home. That's not going to happen.

TRAIN MANAGERS TO GROOM TALENT AND FACILITATE LEARNING

The human resources department or recruiters can do a great job finding the best talent available to fill any given position, but how well that employee is groomed ultimately depends on the manager she works under and directly reports to.

Hence, training managers to appreciate talent and to maximise the ability of those under them is almost more important to your long term workforce outlook than hiring. Team managers are best aware of the strengths (as well as the areas for improvement) of each and every individual on their teams. They are also in tune with the larger vision of the company, and should groom new members accordingly.



Your managers should be able to determine:

- The type of skills the team members need to work on. This will, obviously, differ from person to person.
- How to make up for any shortage of talent in different areas via a systematic approach to learning.
- What the strengths of your team members are, how to build on those strengths, and in the process convert them into a long term competitive advantage.

EVALUATING LEARNING

So what are your employees learning? How do you know if they have even been paying attention and not just using company time to browse through websites of their interest instead of reading up on industry trends?

You need solid assessment criteria in place to evaluate their progress.

- One of the ways in which you can accomplish this is by inviting them to share their ideas with you. Sharing takes many forms, but even an informal question on "what have we learned this week?" can work wonders.
- Encourage them to speak their mind. After all, what use is learning if people cannot share it with others?
- Notice if they are implementing any new work-based skills they ought to have picked up via their learning.



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If they aren't, encourage them to do so. Sometimes people need help bridging the gap from knowing to doing.

- Host a weekly "lunch and learn" session for the team in question. Within the context of the main topic for discussion, employees can share what they've learned, discuss, debate, and recommend reading sources.
- Another good way to keep everyone on track is to have them write a few sentences or a blog (internal or externally available) post which can be shared with everyone in the team, and anyone in management responsible for ongoing learning.

Here's another good overview of how to make sure you're evaluating your learning according to four key evaluation levels.



WHAT ABOUT EMPLOYEES WHO ARE SIMPLY NOT INTERESTED?

You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink. This is even more true for people! Not everyone likes the idea of learning all the time, and in some cases, they'll actively resist it. Common objections will be centered around lack of time, or that they learned everything they need to know in school, or that learning is a distraction from financial or other business objectives.

If you have employees that are resistant to the idea of continuous learning, you'll want to listen to their objections, but approach them in a supportive manner:

- Truly listen to their objections, particularly those around time constraints, as this exercise may expose areas where employees are truly overstretched in their commitments. It's rare that employees will turn down education, all things being equal.
- Explain (again) what's in it for them.
- Delineate all the ways in which they will benefit from keeping their skills updated and how they risk getting left behind if they ignore this aspect.
- Talk about their how their overall career progression will require ongoing education and learning

Worst case, you may need to make changes to staff who are resistant to ongoing education and development, but if you've clearly built ongoing education into your corporate and team values, this shouldn't be a surprise to the employee or others.

If you have clear goals, enough support in place, and lead by example, you should find that most objections fade away.

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Our Blog

6 Essential Qualities Training Managers Need

The training and development of employees is crucial to any organisation's performance. For businesses, the aim is to gain a competitive advantage. For other organisations you'll want to improve how you work or obtain better outcomes. Ultimately, all organisations are looking to optimise their human resources by honing the skills of their workforce.



Training is, therefore, a huge responsibility and needs motivated and skillful individuals to handle it. While there are many opinions on the efficacy of some training programs, few doubt the necessity of really good, targeted training.

Training employees is a challenging job though, and whether you're an independent trainer or employed with a corporation, trainers and training managers are expected to have a ton of qualities for the training to be a success. If we were to hone in on the six most desirable qualities of training managers, however, they would be as follows.



6 Essential Qualities Training Managers Need

1. A DEEP KNOWLEDGE OF THE BUSINESS

A deep and thorough understanding of the business or organisation you are part of is among the greatest assets that you as a training manager can possess. A good rule of thumb is whether you can articulate both what your company does and how it does it in a few simple, concise sentences. Other key areas to be on top of are:

- How your product is bought, sold, and delivered to customers.
- Why your product exists, and what problem it solves.
- How your broader industry operates, the pressures it has, and how it makes money.
- An awareness of the competition and new trends in your line of business

The aim of most corporate training is to maximise company resources and build an efficient and productive workforce. This is only possible when you are aware of the skillsets that your workforce requires. Detailed knowledge of your business or operation is therefore necessary to when designing and evaluating training programs that will help your direct reports achieve your organisation's strategic goals.

2. THE ABILITY TO MEASURE AND ASSESS STAFF TRAINING NEEDS

Awareness of how the training needs of your employees is critical to developing your team. Professional trainers are expected to conduct a thorough training needs analysis before undertaking a training assignment, and as a

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manager, you'll need to as well. This process will help you determine two things – what needs to be learned by your team, and how to prioritise the learning. Don't get fixated on the process though! What truly sets a good training manager apart is her ability to read between the lines and zero in on the essence of a problem.

The best learners make the best teachers. A passion for learning reflects in the quality of your teaching. How can you teach and motivate others if you yourself are lackadaisical about the process of learning?

For example:

you may find that you've been told employees in a certain division are failing to meet their goals. The recommendation comes to you that they need to be sent back to basic training to learn how to do their basic job functions all over again.

Even though this example sounds very specific and it would be easy to take this recommendation unchallenged, this brief is actually as vague as it gets!

A good manager will understand that faltering productivity is just a symptom. The real problem could be anything – an inability to focus, a distracting environment, confusing directions from the team manager, technological challenges, or something else.

Effective managers should develop their people skills and actually enjoy relating to people.

Real life is always more complicated, and part of your challenge as a manager focused on the true training needs of your team will mean you'll need to peel away layers of confusion to get to the heart of the problem. Don't settle for surface solutions – doing so will just demoralise your team and prevent discovery and diagnosis of the true problem.

Assessment of training needs is going to require a lot of interaction and input with a department or employees direct management as well – don't forget to incorporate them into the process. Developing and publishing your training

assessment process is really key as well so everyone can understand how it works, and in some cases even self assess.

3. STRONG COMMUNICATION AND INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Regardless of whether you conduct your own training programs or not, it is imperative for a good training manager to be highly efficient in communication of all kinds.

Understanding problems, conveying ideas, conducting training – all of this is carried through words. If you have trouble communicating, it's unlikely you'll be able to get your staff properly motivated, or effectively describe the reasons behind the need for the training you're recommending to your employees.

But again, while a way with words is a great asset, it is nothing if it's not tempered with empathy, rooted in the understanding of how people learn, and backed by good interpersonal skills. Effective managers should develop their people skills and actually enjoy relating to people. You should love to talk, interact with people, love listening to their problems, love coming up with solutions to these problems, and enjoy motivating your students to be better.

It's worth noting that these skills which will help you be a better training manager are also core skills for any teacher or trainer! In addition to general personal skills, there are some problem solving skills that will help you develop your team. The ability to break complex ideas down into components that make for easier understanding, and the ability to draw the best out of your students is core to helping others learn, and the more you hone these skills, the more you'll be set apart.

4. A PASSION FOR CONTINUOUS LEARNING

The best learners make the best teachers. A passion for learning reflects in the quality of your teaching. How can you teach and motivate others if you yourself are lackadaisical about the process of learning?



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Besides, learning is a continuous process. Every day around the world thousands of academic papers are submitted, hundreds of seminars are given, and thousands of blog posts written discussing new research and insights into age-old management problems. As a corporate trainer who wants to remain on top of the game you need to keep yourself abreast of the latest developments in your field. A passion for learning will make this less of a chore and more of a spirited endeavor.

Be an avid reader and draw from all fields (philosophy, human psychology, sports, nature and wildlife, spirituality, politics – you get the picture!). That's the only way to cultivate a well-rounded understanding of the world we live in. We recommend loading up an RSS reader with quality reading that you can set time aside to tackle. Twitter is another good resource to use as you can follow thought leaders and organisations that provide great insights. Shameless Plug: remember to sign up for our weekly training tips newsletter!

5. INNOVATIVE THINKING

The prospect of attending yet another training session can make anyone, from seasoned corporate executives to employees who have just started, want to shoot themselves in the head. We've all been in plenty of repetitive and monotonous training sessions. We've all sat through presentations that were boring or were clearly

being taught with a minimum of effort by the instructor. Even if students are excited to explore a topic, a bad training sessions can kill any enthusiasm they may have had and trainees will soon start zoning out.

But training (even corporate training) doesn't have to be boring. To keep things fresh and to maximise your chances of gaining and holding your audience's attention, try to improvise on your teaching style. Be different and bold with your training material. Don't regurgitate old formats; have fun with different formats of teaching. Draw inspiration from all around you.

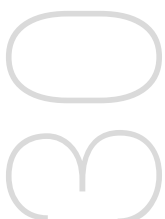
Keep things interesting and entertaining for your students. Push the boundaries of creativity and include newer forms of technology. As mentioned earlier, it helps to have an interest in a wide range of subjects. That allows you to draw plentiful of unlikely and delightful analogies, and create interesting (but effective) training material for your students.

6. EMBRACE EFFICIENCY

Training budgets are almost never static. They're one of the last things to be increased by management in response to growth, and they're one of the first things to be cut! Training managers almost never had the resources they need, whether it's time, money, tools, or buy-in from the rest of the company. These are the realities of the training business though, and they're not going to change, so make sure you develop an acute appreciation of and desire for efficiency. Anything that can save you time or money when delivering the vital education you're responsible for should be examined and sought after. It might be time to think about researching eLearning software or even more comprehensive training management software to help you do more with less.

CONCLUSION

It's a tough job, but it's so important! Hopefully you'll have drawn inspiration and gathered some additional thoughts after reading about these six qualities. If you have thoughts, comments, or questions, don't hesitate to let us know!



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Our Blog

Fundamentals of Great Course Design

An update from our CEO John Peebles on his recent talk to the BILD:

Recently, I was delighted to be a part of the British Institute for Learning and Development (BILD) events series where I gave a talk on the Fundamentals of Great Course Design. For those who wanted to attend but couldn't, I thought I'd provide a brief recap of my talk along with the slides.

COURSE DESIGN IS IMPORTANT. AND HARD.

One of the things that is easy to forget when looking at building a new course is that this is a hard job. Striking the right balance between the material that needs to be covered, directives you might have from clients or your organisation, and making sure the material is fresh and engaging are all challenges you're going to face. While I'd love to write a blog post or give a presentation titled "5 Easy Ways to Quickly Design a Great Course", this is unrealistic. We need to face facts – instructional design is a challenge and we need to approach it with the humility and tenacity that it requires.

That's the bad news.

The good news is that while course design is difficult, it's not impossible, and one of the distinctions I like to make is that there are "two types of hard" – the difference between doing something hard that requires lots of talent vs. something that requires discipline and a methodical approach. Course design is certainly in the "can be learned, doesn't require massive talent" arena.

TEACHERS TRANSCEND COURSE DESIGN

While the focus of this talk was on instructional design,

it's important to keep in mind that teachers transcend the design of your material at all times. Bad teachers will ruin the best course, and good teachers can create an amazing educational experience from nothing. The story I love to tell is that of Valentino Rossi, one of the greatest motorcycle racers of all time who proved the adage that motorcycle racing was 80% rider and 20% machine when he moved from the best bike to the worst, and still won



the championship. Lets not lose site of the fact that in our experience, having had the privilege of observing



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hundreds of training companies and departments, that the number one thing that you can do to increase your educational efficacy is to find and cultivate the best teachers.

good success here at Administrate is using one-click evaluation tools that don't take any effort to respond to, but signal when we've done a bad job so we can perform additional detailed followup.

COURSE DESIGN FUNDAMENTALS

The main thing to realise and focus on when building your course is that you should be able to quickly articulate what problem this course solves. This is a key touchstone for you as a designer, but also for any teacher or student who will teach or take this course, as it provides them their reason for existing. If you're not focused on what problem you're solving, you're going to deliver a weak, unfocused course that isn't compelling for anyone involved. I like to remind people that there are four fundamentals to course design:

- Context – setting the stage for the learning you're going to be imparting. Context is often ignored or glossed over, and you could say that context is one of the main differentiators between taking a course and learning from static materials. Context is something your instructor should provide, students should pay attention to, and is a foundation for what you want to achieve during the educational lifecycle.
- Definition of Goals and Objectives – this is the meat of your course, and when writing a paper, we'd call this "outlining". You should lay out your goals and objectives in a way that is logical, is supported by context, and is ultimately assessed.
- Assessment – Every course needs assessment, not only to measure your student's progress, but also to measure how well it was taught. We really believe that assessment is one of those areas that can be a difference maker for both student and teacher, and I talked about how to troubleshoot assessments and how to incorporate some alternative assessment mechanisms as well.
- Evaluation – one of the things I really believe in is that you should make it as easy as possible to evaluate how you did. One of the ways we've had

THE FUTURE OF COURSE DESIGN AND DELIVERY

The last section of the presentation focused on some of the trends we're increasingly seeing out there in the educational landscape. Many of them revolve around technology and most of the trends are plain to see. However, rather than see all this change as an anxiety inducing aspect, we encourage our clients and colleagues in the industry to look at it as a great opportunity. Education is going to change more in the next ten years than it has in the previous 10,000 – keep learning!



The main thing to realise and focus on when building your course is that you should be able to quickly articulate what problem this course solves. This is a key touchstone for you as a designer, but also for any teacher or student who will teach or take this course, as it provides them their reason for existing.





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Our Blog

How to Teach Critical Thinking Skills

Critical thinking skills are a key part of learning, and something you should make time to cover during training sessions. Unfortunately, many teachers, particularly those running training courses don't spend very much time developing these skills in their students because teaching students to think critically is more challenging than simply delivering content in a lecture format.

While it can take a little more initial planning, once you are used to incorporating these skills into your teaching you will probably find that teaching becomes easier. Your students will be more engaged and participatory in the learning process than ever before!

INTERPRETING, EVALUATING, REASONING, ANALYSING

The main skills that you should be teaching to foster critical thinking are interpreting, evaluating, reasoning and analysing. A simple way to teach and practice these skills is through group discussion and a follow up writing exercise. This type of assignment often works best when you present students with a prompt or argument that they must discuss and defend.

It can be structured into three parts:

- Asking questions (whole group)
- Writing (individual work)
- Assessment

ASK QUESTIONS

Keep Bloom's Taxonomy in mind as you prepare questions. Instead of jumping straight to analysing questions, it may be wise to begin

with recall or basic comprehension questions. This will generate discussion and set the stage. Once students demonstrate their knowledge and show that they are interpreting and reasoning well, push their thinking by moving to questions that evaluate and analyse. This type of teaching will take some preparation, but does not need to be intimidating!

Prepare questions that:

- Are open ended, with no correct or incorrect answer, which will draw students into discussion
- Require an understanding of how pieces of information fit together
- Are relevant and appropriate to the level of your students

The most difficult part about this stage for most teachers is to step back and let the students do the work! If you have prepared good questions that generate conversation, your students should do most of the talking. This can be challenging as it is different from the often preferred lecture style of instruction. Trust that your students are capable!



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PROVIDE ANSWERS THROUGH WRITING

Once you have gotten the ball rolling by asking questions and there has been stimulating discussion, direct students to continue to gather and evaluate evidence. They will need to have information that substantiates their argument or opinion. Students can use other sources of information or continue to discuss with classmates, but will eventually need to formally put their thoughts down on paper. Each paper should contain the following elements:

- A claim, or thesis
- Evidence to support the claim
- Reasoning as to why the evidence does in fact substantiate the claim

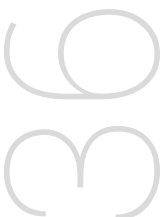
(You will want to make sure that these three elements are clearly defined beforehand so your students know to incorporate them into their writing! This can be done at the beginning of the class or when students begin their writing.)

Each point that the student makes in their writing should support their claim in a relevant way. There should not be any information that does not coincide with the argument that they are making.

ASSESS THEIR CRITICAL THINKING

Once the writing stage is complete, you will need to assess your students' critical thinking skills. As you evaluate their writing, look for arguments and points that meet the following criteria:

- Accurate – statements are factual, and students provide sources for information
- Relevant – points align to the thesis
- Clear – arguments have clarity and are concise
- Specific – justification of the claim is specific



Each point that the student makes in their writing should support their claim in a relevant way. There should not be any information that does not coincide with the argument that they are making. Obviously, their supporting facts should be accurate and specific.

This assessment stage can be done in several ways. You can evaluate each student's writing and assign a grade based on the outlined criteria. You could also have peers the students grade each other's work. Sometimes students are harder on each other than you may be! When assessing, it will be helpful to design a rubric in order to clearly gauge a students' thinking skills.

A FEW FINAL TIPS

If this teaching style is completely new to you and your students, don't worry! Here are a few tips to ensure success:

- Make it Interesting. Choose content that students will find interesting or compelling. The first time that you do an exercise like this, make sure to choose a topic that will be engaging. Don't be afraid to choose one that is controversial! Often those will generate the most discussion. That being said, be sure to set the ground rules to be respectful when sharing different opinions.
- Get Creative. Ask your students to relate whatever they're learning to something they're interested in personally. For example, what does corporate finance have to do with rock music? While maybe there's nothing similar, the exercise of pointing this out and thinking things through will be stimulating and much more interesting to the student.
- Model Your Expectations. Nothing will hinder you more than being unclear. Tell your class from the beginning what the structure is of each section, and what the assessment rubric will look like. It is okay to walk them through a prompt as a group, where you model the writing process for them initially.
- Have Fun! Critical thinking skills are important, but they don't need to be stressful. Start simply and enjoy seeing your students learn and think.



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Our Blog

9 Things You Shouldn't Ask Your Students to Do

As a teacher, you have a unique opportunity to influence and shape the minds of your students. It's easy to spend a lot of time thinking and discussing about what we should be doing every day with our classes and students, but it can be equally worthwhile spending a bit of time discussing what we shouldn't be doing.

To complement the many times you'll give directives, advice, and instructions to your students, we've compiled a list of some things that you should refrain from asking your students to do.

and cause them to become disengaged faster than anything else. The tasks you assign need to have meaning and correlate clearly to your objectives. Otherwise don't assign them! Strive to plan activities with real world connections, so students see how their learning activity correlates to the world around them. If a real world connection can't be made, at least explain the importance of the work. In the rare event that you finish a course early or have more time set aside than you need, have a few resources, tasks, or additional topics set aside that you can use to prevent

wasting time with busy work.

It's worth noting that the definition of busy work isn't just meaningless work – it can also mean work that tests knowledge or skills that students have already learned. This can be a familiar setting for those few students in your class who are smarter and quicker than the rest – they'll look upon assignments that to others are meaningful as busy work! Pay attention to this and prepare some ways for these pupils to advance their education.

2. LISTEN ALL THE TIME

Students should not always just listen! Studies show that most adults

have between a five and ten minute attention span when listening to a lecture. In order to keep students focused and prevent them from zoning out, create opportunities for them to be involved. Discussion, asking questions and



1. BUSY WORK

Busy work (or make-work) is any assignment or activity that is undertaken simply to pass time and stay busy. Asking your students to do meaningless work will frustrate them

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cooperative learning should all be an important part in your classroom.

3. ALWAYS WORK IN A GROUP

Group work definitely has its positive elements and can be a great way to cause genuine learning to happen. However, there can be too much of a good thing! Some students are more shy or reticent and will struggle in groups. Others will abdicate the majority of the work to other group members and not pull their weight. Find a good balance between group work and whole group learning. It is also okay to let some students choose to work in groups or work independently, but make sure that students don't

The release of responsibility begins with guided practice. This is when students begin to implement the strategies and skills that you have taught.

always stay within their comfort zone – require a certain amount of work be done outside of their preference. That way all students have opportunities to learn in situations that benefit their learning style, yet still get exposed to styles they'll continue to encounter elsewhere.

4. COMPETE WITH OTHER CLASSMATES

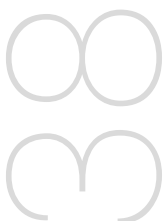
Competition can be a powerful motivator for many people but can also lead to stressful situations and be damaging if it becomes too fierce. Until you have a good feel for your students and how they will learn best, it may be wise to refrain from competitive situations within the classroom. You can incorporate some competition for those students that like (or need) it by challenging students to compete with themselves. Encourage students to set goals, achieve them, than look to beat their previous best



effort throughout a course for a nondestructive form of classroom competition. Just make sure that students understand that everyone is different, and the self-competition results aren't used as a comparison among students.

5. PERFORM A TASK WITHOUT MODELING

This is especially important when introducing new skills or concepts. Model for your students first, then allow them to practice with guidance before letting them work independently. Working through this gradual release of responsibility will ensure success for students instead of just throwing them into the deep end. Note that it is occasionally acceptable to ask students to perform a new task as a pre-assessment tool. Just be sure to identify it as such, and to go back and teach the specific skills necessary once you've gathered your assessment data. Modeling is an important part of teaching, and we talk about this more when discussing "See One, Do One, Teach One" as a method of teaching.



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6. VALUE ANSWERS INSTEAD OF QUESTIONS

Answers aren't everything. Students need to be taught the importance of asking questions! Instead of only seeking out answers from the teacher, students need to value inquiry and how it guides authentic learning. Don't just hand out answers, respond with questions to get your students thinking. Use the Socratic Method to generate discussion and praise your students when they use questioning to delve deep into topics.

The release of responsibility begins with guided practice. This is when students begin to implement the strategies and skills that you have taught. You should monitor and provide scaffolding and support as necessary, but still let students authentically practice.

7. SET VAGUE GOALS

"If you fail to plan, you plan to fail" is a familiar yet powerful adage. Don't ask your students to set goals that lack substance or clear objectives. Doing so will only cause confusion and set them up for failure. Instead, guide them through setting SMART goals. Everyone enjoys reaching goals, so teach your students how to set clear goals that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-Bound!

8. BE SOMEONE THEY'RE NOT

You will have a wide range of personalities and abilities in your classes, just like in life! A common rookie mistake that new teachers make is seeking to control personalities in the classroom, particularly those that are bold. Instead of stifling students' personalities, use them to your advantage!

If you have a vocal student, leverage them to generate discussion. Use your gifted students to be peer tutors or models for the ones who need more help. The old method

of "teaching to the middle" no longer applies – now teachers are expected to differentiate their instruction in order to accommodate all learners. This is not a bad thing, it just means that you need to meet students where they are and help them advance. Use the strengths in your class to help bolster the weaknesses in your class.

9. GIVE UP

There may be times where a task seems out of reach for a particular student. Whether it is too challenging or just not something that a certain person can easily "get", you should never tell a student that they can't do something. This type of situation can be avoided by careful planning (by taking into account your student's learning styles, strengths, weaknesses, and the knowledge you have of the material and class) and guided assistance. Instead of instructing someone to accept failure, set them up for success. This doesn't mean create tasks that are simple and without challenge! Guide and help your students as necessary in order to achieve what they set out to do, and be firm about not letting them give up.

CONCLUSION

Your authority as a teacher is a huge responsibility, so make sure you're not wielding it in ways that can hurt. Hopefully these things you shouldn't ask of your students will get you thinking, and make sure you let us know if you have any more that we haven't covered!



Answers aren't everything. Students need to be taught the importance of asking questions! Instead of only seeking out answers from the teacher, students need to value inquiry and how it guides authentic learning.





Read it on
Our Blog

Teaching Students to Transfer Their Knowledge

The ultimate goal of teaching is more than simply imparting knowledge. Your goal is for your students to transfer what they have learned to a variety of real life situations. A learner needs to take knowledge that they have learned in a classroom and apply it in new contexts.

TEACHING AND FOOTBALL (SOCCER)

A good way to think about this is to consider a football (soccer) team. During practice sessions, football players typically do drills and work on specific skills. The coach will guide the players by demonstrating a skill, providing feedback and correcting as necessary. Players have opportunities to hone their abilities in a relatively low stress environment. However, once it comes time to play in a match, players must be able to transfer what they have practiced into a real in-game setting. The other team will not give them an opportunity to stop and ask their coach which play to use or let them stop to think about how to set up for a goal. If a team cannot execute plays and perform well, they will undoubtedly lose the game.

Teaching is the same way. Much like a football coach, your job as a teacher is to guide and direct, providing feedback and correction. But your job is also to wean your students away from needing your help. They must learn how to transfer what they've learned to new contexts. If they cannot do this, then genuine learning has not occurred. In order to effectively teach students how to transfer their knowledge, a four step approach known as the Gradual Release of Responsibility should be implemented.



Teaching Students to Transfer Their Knowledge



GRADUAL RELEASE OF RESPONSIBILITY

You can think of the Gradual Release of Responsibility approach as a path that takes your students from you the teacher assuming all responsibility to the students themselves assuming all responsibility. To continue our football analogy – the coach starts out doing the drill himself while the team watches and ends with the players performing elements of the drill by themselves on the field during a game!

The Gradual Release of Responsibility approach can be broken down into four phases.

1. Model

This is the most hands on phase for you as a teacher. This is when you model, instruct and scaffold the most. Like a football coach, you will need to provide demonstration of skills and clear directions for your students. The students are mainly observing or taking notes at this point. It should be noted that the majority of your teaching happens here, but it should not take up the majority

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of your classroom time! Aim to have this stage take 25-40% of your instructional time, leaving the rest for the following areas.

2. Guided Practice

The release of responsibility begins with guided practice. This is when students begin to implement the strategies and skills that you have taught. You should monitor and provide scaffolding and support as necessary, but still let students authentically practice. Some students will demonstrate that they are ready for independent practice and can move on, while others may need more support and reteaching. It is appropriate to have some students move on to working independently while some continue to receive support.

3. Independent Practice

Students should eventually begin to perform and use skills independently. Encourage them to be reflective on their practice and evaluate whether or not certain strategies are effective. You can still guide and redirect if necessary, but try to refrain unless absolutely necessary. Think of this as a scrimmage for a football team, where students will practice playing a game. The coach may stop and give directions more than in a real game, but for the most part lets the players practice their skills.

4. Application

At this point, all responsibility is released from the teacher to the student. In order to prove that learning has taken place, students must extend knowledge to completely new contexts. And this is the most challenging part: they must do it autonomously. This can be difficult for both you and your students. It is difficult to watch people struggle with tasks, but do not jump in and help! After all, the football coach cannot run off the side of the field and assist his players. During game time the players must perform on their own!

In terms of assessment, challenge your students with opportunities to apply their skills in a new context. Develop questions and tasks that are similar to our football game analogy- a fluid, novel game situation where reliance on

you, the teacher, is limited. If your test questions contain clues as to how it should be solved, then students are not authentically transferring knowledge.

CONCLUSION

Any good sports coach knows that the gradual release of responsibility needs to happen every day, in every practice. The same is true of every class period. The more you step back and let your students show you what they can do independently, the easier it will be for them when it really matters. Now, this all sounds nice and tidy, but in reality these four steps can be difficult to navigate. Begin your planning and teaching with the end goal in mind: for your students to apply knowledge in novel contexts.

Think of yourself as a football coach who teaches skills, allows your players to practice and hone the skills, then applies them in challenging game situations.



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12 Quick Ways to Check Student Comprehension



Read it on
Our Blog

Assessing students frequently is the best way to really make sure your class understands. While tests or exams are often the norm when it comes to formal assessments, they can often be misleading. A student may score poorly on an exam for a myriad of reasons, none of which are content related. She might have overslept and rushed to class, or may be dealing with a family crisis that is keeping them preoccupied. Or, a student may not understand the wording of questions or might not read very well. The point is, there are plenty of ways a student's performance on a formalised test may not accurately reflect their true comprehension, therefore, it's often a good idea to check their understanding more frequently in less formal ways.

ASSESS MORE FREQUENTLY, LESS FORMALLY

Before a student's knowledge or assessments gets labeled as faulty, it may be beneficial to re-assess. Since retaking a long exam can be time consuming for both the teacher and student, it is often more effective and efficient to check students' understanding on a frequent basis. Quick assessments can be designed to give you a snapshot of what the student knows without taking up too much time. You are then able to gauge if you can move on to another topic or if reteaching is necessary. Here are 12 ways to quickly assess your students:

- Define the Terms: Ask your students to write or say a brief definition for key terms or vocabulary. Mix it up by first requiring students to write without use of notes or resources. Have a peer check the answer or let them use their notes to add more information.
- Illustrate the Concept: Sketch a simple picture, diagram or flowchart of the concept. This is a good tool for students who are visual learners. It will also challenge students who aren't, which is a good thing! Once completed, have your students briefly explain their illustrations and why they included certain elements.
- "Dos and Don'ts": List three "Dos and Don'ts" of a concept. You can assign just "Dos" or just "Don'ts", or a mixture of the two. For example; Do preheat the oven before baking, Do measure ingredients carefully, Don't undercook.



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- Make a “T Chart”: Have students create a chart in the shape of a T and list things that are understood on one side and things that are confusing on the other side. This is also a good tool to use as a pre-assessment and post-assessment, and shows you clearly topics that may need to be retaught or clarified. Students can “transfer” items from one side to the other as they master concepts. (This can also be used as an assignment – tell students to look up or find the answer to the items that are confusing.)
- One Sentence Summary: Write or say a summary of the topic in one sentence. This can be done to a peer who checks them or to you. Mix it up by requiring students to “tweet” using 140 characters or less. This forces them to be concise.
- List: Make a list of everything you know or have learned about a particular topic. This can be done individually or with a partner. A list like this can be added on to each day. This activity is also a good pre and post assessment. The before and after lists can be compared to show how much students have learned!
- Common Misunderstandings: List three common misconceptions about a given topic. Take it one step further by clarifying or disproving the misconceptions.
- Reteach (Teach a Peer): Explain a concept to a peer in ninety seconds. Mix it up by not allowing them to use certain phrases, which will force them to think of new terms or ways to explain the concept.
- Ask Three Questions: Write or ask three questions about a topic. This can be used in two ways- students can ask questions they don’t know the answer to, or ask questions and provide answers to the known questions. Questions can be traded among the students who then have to answer their peer’s.
- Compare and Contrast: Use a Venn diagram to compare and contrast information between several topics. This can be partner work – have one person compare and another contrast.
- Justify: Justify your opinion or position with three examples. You can put a time limit on this to keep it from taking too long. Having a timeframe also forces your students to be concise.
- Critique: critique your work or a partner’s work. Mark areas that can be improved or revised. Keep this quick and simple by putting a time limit on it.

Simple assessments like these are powerful because they give you a pure glimpse of what your students know at that point in time, and allow you to change your teaching accordingly. Since they are usually unscheduled, students aren’t able to cram or study beforehand which provides another valuable data point on how your instruction is being received.

Another advantage to quick assessments is that they are easier to administer and grade, which takes the burden off of you!



Assessing students frequently is the best way to really make sure your class understands. While tests or exams are often the norm when it comes to formal assessments, they can often be misleading.



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Using Bloom's Taxonomy to Develop Educational Objectives



Read it on
Our Blog

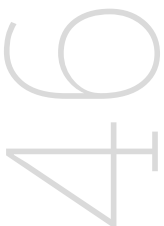
WHAT'S A TAXONOMY?

Many teachers find writing objectives to be a daunting task, but it doesn't need to be! A helpful way to approach any challenge is to use a taxonomy as a guideline. But what's a taxonomy? A taxonomy is just a fancy term for the practice and science of classification.

We use taxonomies all the time – if you've ever used the Dewey Decimal System to find a book in the library or ever heard animals referred to by their scientific classification, also known as their binomial nomenclature classification (for instance, the domestic cat is referred to as the *Felis Catus*), you've used a taxonomy!

Known as Bloom's Taxonomy, this framework clarified the different stages of learning into three main domains: cognitive, affective and psychomotor.

Educators can benefit from using a taxonomy to make sure they're not leaving important items out when designing instruction. We'll walk you one of the more famous educational taxonomies below and show you how to apply it.



BLOOM'S TAXONOMY

Using the components of Bloom's Taxonomy is a helpful tool when it comes to writing objectives and identifying how well your students comprehend a concept.

In 1956, Dr. Benjamin Bloom and several other educational psychologists published a set of guidelines for developing educational objectives. Known as Bloom's Taxonomy, this framework clarified the different stages of learning into three main domains: cognitive, affective and psychomotor. The idea is to use Bloom's taxonomy to help educators focus on all three domains when teaching, thus creating a much more holistic form of education that can fit different learning styles and increase retention. Within the cognitive domain Bloom identified six stages of learning:

- Knowledge
- Comprehension
- Application
- Analysis
- Synthesis
- Evaluation.



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In 2001 his stages were reworked by educational researchers and cognitive psychologists and updated to be verbs. This revised taxonomy makes writing objectives much easier for teachers. The framework builds upon itself, with the first levels being the minimal level of understanding.

It is your job as a teacher to move your students through the cognitive levels, which is why it is helpful to think of them in terms of action words. You want your students to do something with their knowledge, which is why objectives should be written with verbs.

out, but you should try to get your students moving forward as quickly as possible, or depending on the level of your class, require this kind of preparation and learning beforehand.

2. Understand

Once students remember facts, they need to demonstrate an understanding of them.

→ Action Verbs: explain, describe, summarize, defend, predict, give examples.



THE REVISED TAXONOMY

1. Remember

Recalling and recognizing previously learned information. This is the most basic level of understanding as it is rote memory.

→ Action Verbs: describe, define, state, name, order, list, identify.

→ Examples: Quote prices. Identify locations of products in a store for a customer.

You should design your courses and instruction to include review of terms and demonstrate rote memorisation, but only focus on this when starting out. Demonstrating command of definitions and terms is critical when starting

→ Examples: Explain the steps for performing a complex task. Summarise a report.

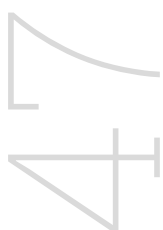
In terms of instructional design, check out our post on some of the great ways you can assess student performance without taking tons of time. Building in time to measure true understanding can be extremely valuable prior to moving your students forward.

3. Apply

Understanding facts is not enough, now students should apply their knowledge to actual situations.

→ Action Verbs: change, choose, illustrate, interpret, show, solve, modify.

→ Examples: Interpret a spreadsheet of data to determine cost.



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4. Analyse

Breaking down ideas or concepts into smaller parts in order to understand the structure and organization. Students who analyze can distinguish between facts and inferences.

- Action Verbs: calculate, examine, model, examine, gather, compare, distinguish.
- Examples: Gathers information from employees and determines an appropriate training based on need. Recognises areas that need improvement in customer service.

5. Evaluate

Making judgements about the value of a system or idea.

- Action Verbs: contrast, criticise, select, supports, defend, justify.
- Examples: Hire the most qualified candidate. Selects the most cost effective solution.

6. Create

Putting parts together to form a whole, ideally an alternative solution.

- Action Verbs: modify, compose, generate, revise, organise.
- Examples: Revises a training manual. Designs a piece of software.

time to take a step back and work on your curriculum a bit or restructure how your course is setup for delivery. Using a taxonomy as a guide is essentially exactly why they've been created, so don't stress if you find a deficiency in your instructional approach – discovering problems and fixing them is the whole point!



CONCLUSION AND APPLICATION

Beyond writing objectives, use of Bloom's taxonomy is also extremely helpful in assessing students' understanding of concepts. Knowing the different levels and looking for where students fall among them will enable you to move them from a basic level of understanding to a more complex level. If you're not hitting every level, it might be



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Read it on
Our Blog

The “7 Cs” of Communication

Teaching is a form of public speaking and should be practised, especially if you are new at it! Public speaking is often something that people get nervous about, but like any skill, with practice you’ll become much more comfortable. As you prepare for your training session and speaking in public, it’s helpful to remember to follow the “7 Cs” of Communication.

methodically work through what you want to communicate. Most people will tend to drift or forget items if they don’t have a clear framework to operate within. Presentation slides can be helpful (see our tips on how to put together a great presentation), but in many classes these can be overkill – often a simple outline will be enough for you to efficiently work through your material in a clear manner.



1. CLEAR

It is important that you clearly communicate the intended information to your students. Be able to explain a concept several ways and answer clarifying questions about the topic. If you find that your students are having difficulty understanding, don’t move on until they do. If you are not clear, then your training objectives will not be met so it is important to ensure that your students understand.

It can often help to outline the topic you’re going to be teaching on note cards or a notepad which can help you

2. CONCISE

It’s also important to keep your message simple and concise. This reduces the opportunity for confusion. If you see that your students are grasping a concept quickly, move on instead of belabouring the point. Even complex subjects that require a lot of detail can be distilled to major themes or modules that you can refer to and use to help anchor students and prevent them from getting lost.

3. CONCRETE

You’ll lose your audience if they feel the information you are sharing is not applicable to them. Think of ways to make real life connections in order to fully engage with your listeners. For example, if you are providing a training seminar on safety procedures, use real life situations where the procedure may be applied. Ask your students for instances where they had to utilise safety procedures and walk through ways to take precautions. It can be helpful to use your students in examples or make up names for characters in a hypothetical situation – use these characters routinely to



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make abstract concepts more tangible for learners. Even for very abstract concepts, it can be helpful to construct an analogy to help explain more involved concepts. Using analogies can be a great way to help students who struggle with more abstract concepts engage.

4. CORRECT

You need to be a master of the content you are delivering. That may take considerable effort and planning beforehand, but it is essential to know what you are teaching! However, if you are asked a question that you don't know the answer to, admit it and be sure to find the answer for the next session. In more advanced courses, expect to be challenged by some of your better students, and welcome this challenge, just be prepared!

5. COHERENT

Be careful not to use filler words such as “um, so, like,” etc. They can take away from your message and are distracting. Try to be aware of phrases that you repeat and stay away from those as well. If you are unsure of your use of filler words, record yourself teaching or give a practice talk to a friend. Listen for commonly repeated phrases and try to eliminate them. If you're prone to using filler words or phrases, it will take practice to drop them from your normal speech, but it will definitely be worth it. Also, don't worry about completely eliminating all your “ums” and “ahs”, as it's not necessary to be completely perfect, just make sure you have them to the point where it's not distracting.

In addition to polishing up your speaking skills, make sure you're presenting your content in a logical manner that doesn't ramble or wander. This is where the outline and note cards we mentioned above can really help. Don't forget it!

6. COMPLETE

Part of your planning process needs to ensure that you allot enough time to complete your objectives. You need to know what the essential pieces of information are and

communicate those to your students. Most likely you will move through material faster than you anticipate, so “over planning” is recommended.

If you find yourself finishing too quickly and your class is tracking with you at each step along the way, have a few other relevant examples or case studies prepared that you can run through the material again (but with a different flavour) to really reinforce understanding and tease out any gray areas within student's minds.


7. COURTEOUS

Treat your students professionally and with respect. Your students will not respect you if they don't feel respected in turn. Even if there is a disruptive student it is your job to be courteous and professional at all times. Often students are disruptive because they want a reaction from the authority figure. If you counter while being polite and calm, chances are they cease being disruptive.

CONCLUSION

While these 7 concepts are important for public speaking, training, and teaching, they are also good rules to follow for all communication! Whether you are writing an email, speaking to a student after class or grading tests, it is important to be clear, concise, concrete, correct coherent, complete and courteous.



A close-up photograph of a hand holding a shiny, ribbed metal cup. The cup is highly reflective, showing distorted reflections of the hand and the background. The background is bright and out of focus, with a blue textured surface visible in the lower right corner. The text is overlaid on the upper left portion of the cup.

Try to be aware of phrases that you repeat and stay away from those as well. If you are unsure of your use of filler words, record yourself teaching or give a practice talk to a friend.

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Using Differentiation in the Classroom to Support All Students



Read it on
Our Blog

“Differentiated instruction is a way of thinking about teaching and learning that raises achievement for all students.” – Carol Tomlinson

Differentiation is a hot topic in education these days. It

In order to identify the abilities of your students, some sort of pre-assessment needs to happen. This can be learning style inventories, self-assessments, or content area tests depending on what type of information you are gathering. It is crucial to know your students and their strengths and weaknesses as soon as possible in order to be able to determine which students need more support and which need challenging.

is frequently misunderstood, which leads it to become a controversial issue. Often teachers feel that the need to differentiate is one more thing to do, when in fact they are probably doing it already! We'll walk you through the basis of teaching with differentiation and three simple steps to help you apply it in your classroom.



THE MINDSET

Teaching with differentiation starts with a mindset. You need to be willing to be flexible to adjust both the curriculum

and your presentation of information rather than expecting students to modify themselves to your teaching. To say it in another way: you need to meet the students where they are instead of expecting them to meet you. Hopefully you will teach students who will rise to the occasion and be motivated enough to go above and beyond what you ask of them. Not all of them will be though, which is why you have to be open to differentiating how you teach in order to help your students be successful. If you have the mindset of your students modifying themselves to your teaching style, your classroom can become combative and thus not very effective.

This may be hard, but a key point of differentiated learning is letting go of the reins a little, and allowing your students to show you how they learn best. This means you won't be able to make all the decisions, but rather steer the students in the right direction. Once you have the correct mindset, implement these two simple steps:

→ Know where your students are. In order to identify the abilities of your students, some sort of pre-assessment needs to happen. This can be learning style inventories, self-assessments, or content area tests depending on what type of information you are gathering. It is crucial to know your students and their strengths and weaknesses as soon as possible in order to be able to determine which students need more support and which need challenging. This also allows you to see what your students already know,

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which will prevent you wasting time by covering topics that your students are already well versed in. However, it also allows you to spot holes in their learning, to make sure you don't miss anything important out.

- Identify areas in curriculum that can be adapted. In all curriculums there is room to change or modify based on the needs of your specific students. Think about pacing, delivery options or how to incorporate strategies like cooperative learning in order to differentiate successfully.

Be willing to accept different forms of assignments, or products, from your students. Certain students may excel in oral presentations while others will demonstrate their best work through a writing assignment.

HOW TO DIFFERENTIATE

There are three main areas you need to focus on to ensure you are using the differentiation technique correctly. These are content, process, and product.

1. Content

Use your pre-assessment to identify certain areas of the content that are problem areas or have already been mastered. Most likely you'll have small groups of students who already have prior knowledge and don't need to spend much time on certain content areas. They can work on an extension project while you cover the basics for the students who need it.

It is also important to look at how you are delivering the content, and whether this is appropriate for everyone. This covers how you suggest students access information (books, online, handouts, etc.), what information you give them to study and also how they study, whether this be on their own, in pairs or in a group. This can allow you to think outside the box a little, and design some creative learning for your content, such as games, blogging or using social media.



This allows all your students to learn in a way that is the most ideal for them, but also ensures that everyone is working towards the same end goal.

2. Process

Vary your process as much as possible in order to engage with your students. This is where the various learning styles come in to play, as you may choose to deliver your content in a way that adapts to your students learning style, or you can go in the other direction, and look for the method that would challenge them the most.

Presentation styles are also a factor, as you may choose to deliver in your content in a number of different ways. While some students may prefer to study from a book, others may prefer to have it read to them, or even complete tasks based on the content. You may need to constantly revisit how you are teaching in order to be as effective as possible for all students.

3. Product

The product is what your students produce at the end of the learning experience, whether that be completing a written test, writing an evaluation or participating in a project. Be willing to accept different forms of assignments, or products, from your students. Certain students may excel in oral presentations while others will demonstrate their best work through a writing assignment. If your goal is to ascertain whether or not your students mastered the material, the type of product shouldn't matter as much. Be open to accepting a variety of assessments or projects as long as your students are learning.



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It is also important that your students are constantly reflecting on the work they are doing. This allows both the students and the teacher to see what is working and what isn't, and lets you adjust the work they are completing and how you are delivering it. Reflection also means that students are able to set goals for future learning, so they constantly have something to work towards.

CONCLUSION

It can be a little daunting to think about raising achievement for all students, regardless of their prior knowledge, experience or ability level. That is what makes effective teaching a challenge! It IS possible though, if you know your students and are willing to have the correct mindset. Most often if your students know that you are committed to helping them succeed, half the battle is already won. Not only does this allow your students find a learning style that works for them, it will also allow you to explore a side of teaching you might not have experienced before, so everyone gets a chance to expand their knowledge.



The Importance of Emotional Intelligence in Training



Read it on
Our Blog

Emotional intelligence (EI) is defined as the “ability to monitor one’s own and other people’s emotions, to discriminate between different emotions and to use emotional information to guide thinking and behaviour.” EI is a quality that is being increasingly valued in

others can work on building a better emotional intelligence. Let’s look at how EI can help trainers and coaches do their job better, and why you should work on honing your emotional intelligence too.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE HELPS YOU COMMUNICATE BETTER

Now we are not saying that merely possessing good emotional intelligence also makes you articulate and adept at expressing yourself in all manners and ways, absolutely not. How well you speak depends on: a) Your natural talent for it. b) Your experience. c) Above all, your willingness to practise the skill. But assuming you have been practising your communication skills all these years, emotional intelligence can take you further because now you will have the added ability to

organisations around the world. The reasons are not difficult to understand. An awareness and understanding of our own emotions enables us to recognise the same in the others. It forms the basis of empathy, which is a crucial attribute in a leader, a manager, or more pertinent to our point, a trainer. It’s not enough to be knowledgeable, well-read, smart, or intelligent. If you cannot meet people where they are, you will not be able to raise them to the level you want them to rise to. Fortunately, all of us can improve our EI. While some are naturally highly intelligent in this regard,

actually listen to your audience and understand their reaction to your training. When you are able to gauge your students’ sentiments accurately, you are able to bring the desired changes in your own approach to engender a better dialogue, instead of just going on and on, hoping to impress one and all with your great eloquence and knowledge. Good verbal skills mean little if they are not complemented by good listening skills, along with the ability to understand different reactions and points of view. Good communication skills involve verbal as well as



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non-verbal signals, a combined understanding of which helps trainers put their point across more effectively.

Because emotionally intelligent trainers relate with people better, they are able to gain a more than passing understanding of what motivates their students.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE HELPS YOU GET ALONG WITH ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE

We all get along with certain types of people better than others; mostly those who are like us and whom we can relate to on some higher or invisible level. If your job requires you to meet new people all the time, you don't have the luxury to simply connect with those whom you are drawn to naturally and ignore the rest. You have to make sure you get along well with everybody at least reasonably well. It's a tough ask, but those with a higher emotional intelligence will be able to pull it off better than those without it. As a trainer you will coach a variety of students over your career. Some of them young and fresh out of school, eager to learn new things; others experienced and at best lukewarm to you; and yet others old and jaded, not really interested in listening to what you have to say because they think they have seen and heard it all. Some will talk a lot and ask many questions, while others will simply not open up. It won't matter how different they are from each other because your brief will remain the same – to coach them all to the best of your ability.

SO HOW DOES EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE HELP YOU WITH THIS?

Here's how. Because high EI makes you sensitive to other people's states of mind, their emotions, as well as their

defences/inhibitions, it helps you tailor your approach to different temperaments. This ability to switch gears when greeted with different personalities and learning styles is important for trainers to possess. It helps them know how to deal with the gregarious outgoing types, as well as those painfully shy and averse to speaking up. Your students will also be able to relate to you better. When they see you not just taking an interest in their learning but also moulding your approach to suit their personality, they are very likely to trust you and feel encouraged to participate in the classroom. In any case, it helps for a trainer to give off the vibe that he or she is approachable and that they value all their students' opinions.



EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE LEADS TO A HEIGHTENED SELF-AWARENESS

An acute awareness of one's own self means a deep familiarity with one's emotions, moods, triggers, motivations, weaknesses, and strengths along with a host of other things. Self-aware people know what they lack and need to address. They also know how to nurture their self-confidence. If they also possess the ability to manage their emotions well and have the work ethic to back their ambitions, they can go from strength to strength. For a trainer, this is a great attribute to possess. You don't need others to point out your weak areas.



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You know them already and in all likelihood have been working on addressing them, whether they pertain to your professional life or to your personal relationships.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE MAKES YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT MOTIVATES PEOPLE

Because emotionally intelligent trainers relate with people better, they are able to gain a more than passing understanding of what motivates their students. One can eventually figure this out regardless of whether they are highly emotionally intelligent or not, but those with a good level of EI are able to determine this a lot faster. They sometimes know people even when the people may not know themselves. The ability to understand what motivates people helps trainers in a number of ways and not just when they are conducting training sessions. It helps them determine the training needs of the employees, design excellent training material around these needs, understand the goals and objectives of the management, negotiate with them for a better budget or enhanced facilities, and of course, deliver excellent training sessions. To sum up, EI gives you the understanding of how to negotiate with people, draw them out, persuade them, and ultimately win them over to your point of view. Depending on the trainer's own level of ethics, this can be a good or a bad thing, but one can certainly see the positives to emerge out of the aforementioned abilities.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE HELPS YOU REACH YOUR FULL POTENTIAL AS A TRAINER

When you look at all the points presented above collectively, it becomes clear that EI can help you tap into your full potential. Training is about communicating ideas – whether these ideas are being exchanged with board members of an organisation, your colleagues, or your students. And you are always able to communicate better when you are aware of the underlying emotions at work.

CONCLUSION

Growing up we have all had teachers who couldn't care less about the progress of their students. They did have the knowledge and the expertise to help us, but somehow they simply did not have the kind of effect on us that they should have had. If you've ever wondered what they were missing, the answer is emotional intelligence. The shows in the ability to relate to their students and meet them where they are, take an active interest in how they fare, and make learning a joyous experience for all those involved. Maybe they didn't really care about us, which makes us all the more thankful for the teachers that did. As a trainer, you want to be the exact opposite of the worst teacher you have ever had. Instead, think of the most charismatic teacher you've encountered, the one who inspired you to do your best, and was happy when you actually lived up to your potential. A trainer needs a host of skills to succeed and create an everlasting impression on their students. It's important to work on them all, but it's equally important to base your approach to coaching in sound emotional intelligence. It's the thread that ties everything together and helps you stand out as a trainer.



An acute awareness of one's own self means a deep familiarity with one's emotions, moods, triggers, motivations, weaknesses, and strengths along with a host of other things. Self-aware people know what they lack and need to address.



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How Sports Coaching Can Inspire You to be an Excellent Trainer



Read it on
Our Blog

With the biggest football extravaganza on the planet coming to a close last weekend, there can't be a better time to talk about ambition, passion, success – and its dark twin - failure. While the world is obsessed with the players, we find it fitting to talk about the coaches who are leading the young participants, and have inspired and guided them to get to where they can play on the biggest stage fearlessly.

Football is a game of glorious uncertainties, and so is life. If you follow any sports, you must admire certain coaches. Why is that? What do you like the most about them? Is it their discipline, ferocity, and tenacity? Do you like their style, or the way they inspire players to raise their game? Have you tried to cultivate any of their traits or employed any of their methods in your training?

Well, we certainly think trainers like you can hugely benefit from a number of attributes displayed by successful and inspirational coaches, and to that extent we have come up with a not-so-short list. So let's get the ball rolling!

WORK WITH PASSION

There is no faking passion. Passion is where the energy to continue with high intensity, day after day, comes from. Successful trainers speak for long hours. They are constantly jetting in and out of their city, meeting new people, gauging the needs of others, and preparing effective training material. Most importantly, they deliver it with conviction.

If any of the above misses passion, every other activity in the chain of events will be affected, and things will get progressively worse.

Alex Ferguson coached Manchester United for almost 27 years. That's a very long time, no matter how you look at it. He saw his team lift a total of 38 trophies under his tutelage. That averages more than a trophy per year under his guardianship, which is an excellent record. It was, of course, not all smooth sailing; they also hit the rough many a time. But while you may disagree with his methods or cringe at his lack of PR skills, what you absolutely must learn from the man is his passion for his work. That which made him turn up for his team day after day for 27 long years.

It sounds almost clichéd to talk about passion and sports coaches but it needs to be emphasised here, because passion is a rare commodity. Because all teaching is a transfer of energy, it's imperative for you as a trainer to be fired up about what you are teaching, and absolutely believe in your training material, for it to have the desired effect on your audience.

DREAM BIG AND BIGGER

Sports coaches don't have an option but to dream big. If they don't, their management will find someone who does and is able to bring the desired success, fame, and profits to the franchise. Non-celebrities, however, always have the option of not dreaming big. And many of us exercise it, too!

But as a trainer, you must aim big. Refine each and every aspect of your training style and material for better impact.

→ Challenge yourself to prepare the best material you can.



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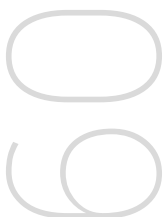


- Be a voracious reader and an eager consumer of technology. Read on psychology, anthropology, photography, history, arts, science — whatever takes your fancy. The wider your interests, the richer your training material can be.
- Practise your presentations and method of delivery in front of the mirror until you have mastered each and every aspect of it. A good trainer is an entertainer at heart. He loves to speak, loves to hold his audience in thrall, and signs off with a flourish. Nothing wrong with a bit of showmanship if it helps you stand out in

“Today’s coaches must be multi-functional, and be equally competent as a manager, tactician, trainer, psychologist, physiologist, and sometimes even a counsellor. You simply cannot coach the same way as you did ten, fifteen, or twenty years ago for a number of reasons.”

people’s minds.

- Put great thought and care into your presentations and teaching material.
- Have a plan B to get on top of worsening situations, for instance when you realise your training material isn’t creating an impact at all on your students.
- Be quick to think and be quick to act (when faced with uncomfortable questions from your audience).



How Sports Coaching Can Inspire You to be an Excellent Trainer

Aim high and back your dreams with passion; you will rise to prominence in your niche, no matter how crowded it may seem. Ambition backed by passion and commitment always finds a way to stand out.

SHAKE OFF THE CRITICISM

So your team has been thrashed by your arch rivals for the fourth time this year and fans are baying for your blood. You’re coping with a steady stream of abuse on Twitter and the media is calling for your head. Your billionaire owners aren’t too happy with you either. You were, after all, signed up for a tidy sum and have failed to deliver. They could easily replace you, and you know that.

What do you do? Shrug your shoulders, go off the grid, and focus on reformulating your strategy for the remainder of the season, or fight depression, have a life-altering conversation with your wife, and hand in your resignation? There’s no right or wrong way of approaching this hypothetical scenario, which by the way, plays out in teams around the world all the time. But it does take a lot of resilience and courage, not to mention self-belief, to tune out the criticism and instead focus on reorganising your resources.

For trainers whose programs failed to create the desired effect, whose management isn’t happy with the resultant low return on investment, and all those who are struggling to keep their head above water, resilience is a great quality to cultivate – especially if you own a training business.

While resilience is required in any sphere of life, it’s even more important when you are responsible for guiding entire batches of bright minds.

INSPIRE, INSPIRE, INSPIRE

This is perhaps the biggest lesson you can learn from a coach you like.

They manage to lead a team of big achievers and bigger egos year after year. They ride the troughs and crests of fate and fortune with remarkable fortitude. How does one man inspire so many others to give their best on the field? Contrary to what many think, it’s not through big words delivered in an evocative fashion. According to one report,

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the most inspiring coaches of London Olympics, 2012, were considered so because of the following main attributes:

- Controlling the controllables.
- Attention to detail.
- Hard work.
- Preparation.
- Managing expectations.
- Creating opportunities.
- Building relationships.
- Perseverance.
- Helping.
- Motivating.
- Communicating.
- Having a positive attitude.

What do you think you can pick from this list? Which attributes do you think you possess, and which could use some honing?

MAKE FRIENDS WITH CHANGE

As the world evolves, so do its expectations from its leaders. We are all expected to keep up with the changing times.

New research displaces old notions all the time. Your long-cherished theories may one day be debunked. Your organisation may cease to exist. Technology may change the face of training beyond recognition.

Technology is changing sports, as are the newer realities of a more connected and globalised world. Add on to this the dwindling attention spans of audiences directing how certain games are played, and it means the coaches you admire are having to pay attention and change with the times.

Here's Gary Curnee's, a professional coach and blogger, perspective for you:

"Today's coaches must be multi-functional, and be equally

competent as a manager, tactician, trainer, psychologist, physiologist, and sometimes even a counsellor. You simply cannot coach the same way as you did ten, fifteen, or twenty years ago for a number of reasons."

Much the same can be said of the role of a trainer. You cannot carry on the way you did a few years ago, and another ten years down the lane, the field of learning and development will have undergone even more changes. To stay relevant, you must keep learning and be cognisant of the changes impacting your field. Take it all in your stride to remain on the top of your game.

CONCLUSION

On the surface, the stage doesn't seem to be as grand for a trainer as it is for a sports coach. There is no glorious trophy at the end of all the long hours filled with sweat and tears. But that does not mean that the impact a good trainer has on his students is any less in magnitude.

While numbers certainly are a measure of success, the biggest metric is influence. How many of your students do you think you have inspired? How many have felt attending your courses was a great use of their time? More importantly, what can you do to make your training sessions more inspirational, the kind that stay with your attendees long after they have left the auditorium?

Leave a comment and let us know.



Encouraging Staff to Be Better Team Players



Read it on
Our Blog

Team work makes the world go round. It is essential to getting anything done. No one, regardless of how efficient they are, can fly solo and still meet constant deadlines as well as handle big projects.



All of us have worked in teams at some point and are familiar with various team dynamics. It's not difficult to work with others but it does require certain adjustments. Some people find it easier to work in a team, while others are simply not able to get along with anyone.

Good team play requires members to be flexible, quick to adapt to new situations, and assume responsibility for team goals. However, if you happen to lead a team that contains more than its fair share of seemingly uninterested members, or sees a lot of conflict and in-fighting leading to compromised productivity, we may have some helpful suggestions for you. Let's look at how to encourage people to work together and grow strong as a team.

UNDERSTAND THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

When you are not happy with the output of your team, you need to ask tough questions such as:

- What is holding them back?
- Has there been a lack of communication regarding directions to follow?
- Are the subordinates scared of asking questions?
- Are they not competent enough?
- Are some of the team members slacking?
- Is there politics at work?

There could be a number of issues involved, so don't just assume that your team is deliberately under-performing. However, after having examined all the angles, if you arrive at the conclusion that certain team members are consistently falling short of their targets and impacting overall productivity of the team, you may want to speak to them about why that is.

Some people are shy and afraid of asking questions that they feel may make them look silly. Other team members genuinely get it all wrong, while some people may just need additional training or mentoring. It's important to realise that everybody may have a different problem, and while they may want to give their best, the wrong attitude could be holding them back. As a team leader, focus on drawing people out of their shells and try to genuinely understand their problem to find a way forward.



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ENCOURAGE COMMUNICATION AMONG TEAM MEMBERS

This follows directly from the previous point. For a team to be efficient and productive all the members need to be on the same page. This requires open channels of

An awareness and knowledge of each other's personality type and working style can mitigate these misunderstandings to a large extent. There's a reason that universities offering advanced courses insist on splitting their students into groups and subjecting them to MBTI testing.

communication between the members as well as the team leader(s).

Encourage your team members to speak up at the first sight of a problems and ask them to get even the slightest of doubts clarified before proceeding with assignments. Understand the strengths and weaknesses of all your team members and get them to help each other out based on these strengths. For example, at an advertising firm a copywriter is struggling with making sense of market research and finding good taglines, whereas another is skilled at it. If they are both on the same team, their leader should get the skilled writer to help out the struggling writer. Sharing knowledge and helping others not only creates a good bond among team members but also positively affects the productivity of the team itself.

STRESS THE IMPORTANCE OF MEETING TEAM GOALS

Sometimes people are unable to get along with each other due to personal differences. There could be ego clashes, a stubborn refusal to compromise, or simply a lack of interest in pulling their weight.

Situations such as these arise because more than one team member is too focused on all the wrong things –



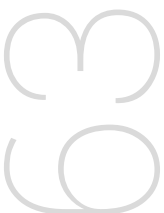
their personal equation with others, their own pride/ personal issues, or a lack of interest in the work assigned. Shifting their focus to things that really matter is the best solution to this problem. It's important for a team to meet its goals, failing which everybody in the team suffers. As an example, make it clear to your team that their failure to meet team goals may affect the appraisals of all of them regardless of who was at fault, and that blaming other team members is not acceptable. At the end of the day what matters is team performance; if the team fails, it reflects badly on all the members. A clear warning like that will get people to look past personal differences and work towards collective goals.

EDUCATE THEM ABOUT DIFFERENT PERSONALITY TYPES

Sometimes an inability to get along with someone is based on a misunderstanding of their working or learning style. People may not have anything against you personally, though you may be convinced otherwise.

An awareness and knowledge of each other's personality type and working style can mitigate these misunderstandings to a large extent. There's a reason that universities offering advanced courses insist on splitting their students into groups and subjecting them to MBTI testing.

The star performer of your team loves to talk and hog the limelight, leaving other less charismatic ones seething with resentment and feeling left out. They may feel he's doing this on purpose but some people just want to talk



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more; they are naturally full of energy and bubbling with ideas. To know you are dealing with an extroverted person with an activist style of learning can help you understand how to deal with them.

Similarly, the louder ones would do well to appreciate the reflective style of learning and functioning of the introverts instead of accusing them of dragging their feet in team meetings. For a deeper understanding of how the members of a team work together, check out Belbin's team roles model, which describes the nine different team roles people can fall under.

This is not to stereotype people, but to understand that everybody functions in a different manner and that tolerance for different outlooks and abilities is a must for smooth functioning of a team.

see their leader interested in their personal progress and giving off a positive vibe, most people will open up and want to give their best. This is the best way to cultivate positive team dynamics and encourage people to be good team players.



TELL THEM WHAT'S IN IT FOR THEM

Appealing to a person's sense of profit never fails. Spell out all the ways in which meeting team goals and improving productivity will help them personally. Point out to them the possibilities of career progression and lay out a plan for this to materialise. When faced with solid incentives and rewards, most people will realise the importance of rising above laziness and petty behaviour, and instead take responsibility for their work and increase their involvement in the team.

CONCLUSION

As the leader of your team there is a lot you can do to extract the most out of your team members as well as get them to work together in harmony. You will, however, have to lead by example. To begin with, be approachable and friendly. Lay down the ground rules and treat everybody with equal respect. Take an active interest in your people and find out their aspirations and challenges. When they



*It's important for a team to meet its goals, failing
which everybody in the team suffers.*



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How to Hold the Best Brainstorming Sessions



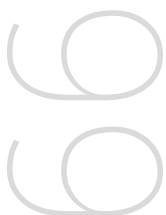
Read it on
Our Blog

Brainstorming is something that most of us will have done several times in our lives. Whether it was at school, university, at work, or even in your personal life, it's a great way of generating lots of ideas and getting over the initial hurdle of any project – the blank page! However, it can be easy to think a brainstorming session is the solution to your problem, only to find you've just wasted a large amount of time and ended up none the wiser.



Brainstorming is a very informal way of holding a planning session, and it's this laid back approach that makes them so successful. It is still important however, that you go into the process with a clear idea of how the session should work to make sure you get the most out of your time and the people involved.

We've picked out the most important things to consider before you jump into a brainstorming session, so let's get organised!



How to Hold the Best Brainstorming Sessions

SET YOUR GOALS

While brainstorming is usually considered one of the first stages of tackling a problem, you really need to decide on the goals and outcomes of your project before you start generating ideas around it. Coming up with ideas around a particular problem or area of your business is all well and good, but you really need to decide what it is you want to achieve, and then you can work towards that end goal.

You've obviously decided you need to brainstorm for a reason, so what was that? Are you trying to solve a specific problem or just looking for more input on a particular situation? What has to happen for you to be satisfied that your problem is solved and the project is finished? This is your end goal and you'll use the brainstorming session to figure out what you need to do to get from your problem to your solution.

When you are holding your brainstorming session it is important to keep this outcome in the back of your mind at all times. Not only will this help keep your discussions and ideas focussed, it will allow you to quickly see which ideas are going to help you achieve that end goal.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

While you may have a standard set up for other meetings you hold, you need to be especially considerate when it comes to brainstorming. These sessions are all about being creative, and encouraging people to participate as much as possible. You'll want to make sure your surroundings bolster everyone's creativity, so perhaps consider getting out of the office for a little while and

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popping to a local coffee shop if you don't have anything suitable within your building. A more informal setting may encourage participants to chill out a bit and think outside the box, which can be where some of the best ideas come from.

You'll also want to be considerate of this when planning the day and time of your session. Are people going to be on their best game first thing on a Monday morning or last thing on a Friday? Probably not! According to Mind Power News, the best time for creativity is between 9am and 11am, so perhaps a mid-week, morning slot would be best to get the most from your brainstorming session. Think about when you're are most productive yourself during

If your struggling on how to kick off the creative ideas process in your brainstorming session, why not try Eyewire Creativity Cards. You can print off these 20 cards, each of which gives you a different way to look at your problem which you may not have thought of before.

the working week and you'll probably find the perfect brainstorming time.

TIMING IS KEY

As is the same with any meeting, it can be easy to get carried away and end up spending a lot of time discussing a problem, instead of actually doing something about it. The best way to get around this is to set a strict time limit for your meeting and make sure you stick to it! The amount of time you spend will correlate to how big a problem you're trying to tackle, but brainstorming sessions shouldn't last any more than a couple of hours. Not only will you be wasting time if you schedule them for longer, but people are unlikely to stay fresh and motivated for long periods of time.

Additionally, it is also important to try and get as much out of the time as possible, so don't finish early! Even if the ideas are tapering off, those last five minutes could lead to a major breakthrough, so use all the time you've set aside.



To ensure you stay on track, make sure you elect someone to be in charge of the session at the beginning. It will be their job to make sure you run on time and that everyone is staying focussed on the task in hand.

MAKE IT VISUAL

This is possibly one of the most important things about brainstorming, and it is what makes it a great way to map out your ideas. It also means you have a hard copy of all your planning, so things won't be forgotten, and it is easy to refer to at a later stage.

There are several different ways you can document your brainstorming sessions, but the important thing to remember is you don't have to keep them neat. The ideas might be flowing very quickly, and it's more important to get everything down than it is to make it look nice. For all these techniques you can either use some paper and a pen, online tools, or a whiteboard if you want to make it more visible to everyone, though this may mean copying all the information down at the end of a session so you have a copy to take away with you, though this can be easily done by taking a photograph.

Here are some of the most common ways to document your brainstorming:

Mind Map

A mind map is one of the most popular ways of keeping tracking of everything you discuss in your brainstorm. Start by drawing a circle in the middle of the page with the problem you want to tackle drawn in the centre. Every idea that someone contributes about the problem should be



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added on a line coming away from the circle. Connected ideas or developed ideas should branch out from the same line, so you can see how everything intertwines. Online tools such as iMindMap, allow you to create mind maps on your computer, smart phone or tablet, if you're not into pen and paper. If you're interested in more tools available to you, Mashable has a list of 24 essential mind mapping and brainstorming tools.

SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis is a great way to see your problem from a number of different angles, and allows you to come up with ideas you may not have considered before. Split your page into four sections, each with one of the four headings strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. You can also print off some great templates for a SWOT analysis, so you'll always be prepared. Looking at your problem from these four viewpoints will challenge you to think differently, and hopefully come up with a solution that was hard to see before.

Post-it Notes

Post-it Notes are a great way of laying out your ideas. The limited size means you have to be quick and concise with your idea, which prevents you wasting time by writing out huge paragraphs. They are also very easy to move around, so if you want to group certain ideas together, it's much easier than it would be if it was written on a page. Additionally, Post-it Notes give you more creative freedom, as you can stick them to a large sheet of paper, the desk, the wall, a whiteboard, pretty much anything! Post-it Notes encourage a collaborative approach to documenting the session too, as everyone can be given a pad to write their separate ideas on, and then they can be discussed when they are being stuck on the larger mind map.

Don't Dismiss

Brainstorming is all about coming at a problem from different angles, and getting other people's opinions which are different than your own. It's important to take every idea on board and don't dismiss things offhand as a "bad idea". What may seem like a strange approach at

first, may turn out being the winning idea in the long run. Take the time at the beginning of the session to stress to all participants that they should put forward every idea they have, and create a safe space where they know they won't be ridiculed for anything they say.

Some team members will be shyer than others, and ensuring that everyone feels comfortable sharing their input is important. Missing out on input from these team members means you could lose some of the best ideas, and the session will be a waste of time for people who don't feel valued.

Getting as many different ideas and outlooks on the problem is the main aim of a brainstorming session, and even if some ideas aren't fully formed, sharing them in an open environment means other team members can build on these ideas, and you'll get a collaborative outcome that wouldn't have come about another way.

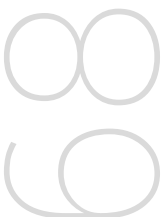
If your struggling on how to kick off the creative ideas process in your brainstorming session, why not try Eyewire Creativity Cards. You can print off these 20 cards, each of which gives you a different way to look at your problem which you may not have thought of before. These are handy as you can take them along to any brainstorming meeting you have in the future, in case you get stuck.

Review and Follow Up

A review session after the brainstorming session will be the time when you take all the ideas generated and decide which are good and which are bad. Maybe bad ideas are things that just aren't feasible, don't fit in with company guidelines or would cost far too much money, but these can be ruled out pretty much straight away. Parts of these ideas may be changed and incorporated into a useable idea, which is why it's so important not to veto anything during the first stage.

Next sort through the good and usable ideas, and decide on the next steps. Organising what happens next is important for a number of reasons:

- The project has already been kicked off with the brainstorming session, but moving on to a more detailed stage means the project is really getting under way.



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- It allows team members to see that their ideas are being used, and not just being sucked into a vacuum. This will encourage them to participate in more sessions if they had fun and feel like they are contributing.
- It keeps the project rolling while the brainstorm is fresh in everyone's mind and everyone is excited about being involved.

CONCLUSION

Brainstorming can be a great resource for generating ideas and getting organised, as long as it is done properly. You want to make the most of your time, and make sure you are getting the best ideas possible. While the session itself may seem a little hectic, especially if everyone is getting very excited and generating a lot of ideas very quickly, if you organise yourself beforehand, you can make sure the session is as worthwhile as possible.

The more brainstorming sessions you attend and run, the more familiar you will be with how to use your time effectively and which documentation techniques work best for you. Combine this with our tips and you'll be a brainstorming expert in no time.



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How to Encourage Student Retention with Great Training Sessions



Read it on
Our Blog

These days trainers can face a tough task of holding a student's attention when there are so many distractions available. Retaining material is challenging for students even in the best of conditions, but it has become a lot more difficult in recent times due to the technology filled world we live in, with so many things clamouring for peoples' attention.

People tend to remember things better when they have been entertained, as opposed to when they turn up for a training session simply because they should be learning. Telling a story may be a welcome break from sitting taking notes or reading information from a screen, so your students may not even realise they are learning, as stories are presented as a fun activity.

So what should a trainer do to make sure his training material stays with his students? Well, we are of the mind that the best way to encourage the retention of material in your students is by delivering it in a memorable fashion.

It is a fact that how well we remember something depends a lot on the kind of impression it had created on us at the time.

You may think your training material is top-notch, and it may well be, but quality material alone does not guarantee long-term retention of it. If your material is bland, people will forget it even before they have stepped

out of the class.

To maximise the chances of your students remembering your material for months to come, if not forever, you will need to make sure that your material is interesting and make sure you deliver it in a certain way.

Let's look at some of the techniques you can use to help your material linger for longer in the memory of your students.

TELL A GOOD STORY

Who doesn't like a good story? Story telling has long been considered one of the best modes of teaching. Fables and parables have passed on collective wisdom to new generations for ages.

STORIES ARE MEMORABLE

The narrative structure of a story makes it much easier to remember than a string of facts that might not have much connection. If your students have to follow the clear structure of a beginning, a middle, and an end, this natural sequence will make the facts easier to recall at a later date. If your students can follow the narrative of your story, they are more likely to become engaged with the information, and will be involved enough to want to know what happens next and how the story ends.

Stories are entertaining

People tend to remember things better when they have been entertained, as opposed to when they turn up for a

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training session simply because they should be learning. Telling a story may be a welcome break from sitting taking notes or reading information from a screen, so your students may not even realise they are learning, as stories are presented as a fun activity. They are also more engaging than just being told information, as people can ask questions or even discuss the stories afterwards with their classmates.

Sitting in a class, having lots of complicated information dictated to you is nobody's idea of fun, so a good way to get your students more invested in the work is to get them involved.

STORIES ARE RELATABLE

Because they have a human element to them, people can relate to stories far better than they would to training material such as statistics, surveys, and studies. While they do sound impressive, they don't really do much to get people's imagination going, unless you are lucky to be teaching classes full of statistics enthusiasts. Stories have characters that you students can follow, and relate to, which will make them more invested in the outcome of the story. For all the above reasons, it's a great idea to incorporate instructional story telling in your teaching material. If you can develop training material around a fictional character and use his fictional journey to make your points, you will have significantly increased your chances of delivering a memorable training session.

USE STRIKING VISUALS

When you can't tell a good story, impress them with grand visuals. Hollywood is riding high on success based not on memorable stories but on outstanding VFX that cast a spell on the audience.

Now, of course, we aren't asking you to go the VFX way or anything remotely like that, we're merely pointing you towards the power of pictures, images, and videos, and why you should work with them to make your sessions more interesting and impressive.

Here are some ways of incorporating the visual element in your classes.

- Break up the text on your presentation slides or course material with captivating pictures that further your point. A picture is worth a thousand words, after all. It's a lot more likely to stay with your students than chunks of well-thought out text.
- Include short videos in your training material. You don't have to create these videos yourself, though that is not a bad idea either. Sites like YouTube mean you have a vast library of videos to choose from to enhance your training material.
- Include popular culture references. For example, a session describing the importance of observing all the safety measures in the work place, particularly in hazardous industries, could be hard to digest completely in one session. How about using a clip from Road Runner and Wily E. Coyote to get your point across, and lighten things up, from time to time? Your audience may not remember all the detailed points you made, but they will grasp the essence of it, if you time the videos strategically.



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EMBRACE A BIT OF SHOWMANSHIP

We have spoken so far of intriguing material and an entertaining way of delivering it, but since you're a trainer, and the cynosure of everybody's eyes for the entire duration of a training session, your own levels of energy and enthusiasm for your subject will also be a huge determinant of how much of your session your students remember.

If you don't have passion for the content you're teaching, or if you come across bored, your students will pick up on this and it will affect the way they learn. If you aren't excited about the material, then why should they be? Make sure you've created a presentation that you can really get excited about teaching, and your enthusiasm will be clear to the students.

Look at how you are teaching your class and address all the weak points in your method of delivery. Take public speaking classes if you get nervous in front of big audiences. Speaking well and speaking with confidence are acquired skills. You want to do full justice to your excellent material, don't you?

TALK MORE ABOUT CASE STUDIES

Theories are great, but case studies are better. Case studies work for the same reason that stories work – they engage students' imagination.

Find the best case studies you can pertaining to your subject of teaching, and include them as often as you can in your training material.

Now case studies can be presented as they are, or you can enliven them with a combination of good story telling on your part, striking visuals, and an enthusiastic delivery of the material.

If you get the mix right, you will find students not losing their interest in your teaching. When they are giving you all their attention, without trying hard not to check their phone every two minutes, you know you have done everything you can to make your session a success.

GET STUDENTS INVOLVED

Sitting in a class, having lots of complicated information dictated to you is nobody's idea of fun, so a good way to get your students more invested in the work is to get them involved. This could be in the form of simply encouraging participation from your students, by allowing them to ask questions throughout, to using things like group work or brainstorming to help your student engage with the information.

If your students have been able spend time thinking about the information you are presenting to them, either on their own or by discussing it as part of group work, it should help them take away more from the class and be able to recall more information at a later date.

CONCLUSION

Learning is one of the most exciting things we can do with our time and it's a pity that it may have become synonymous with "boring". Fortunately the explosion of knowledge-driven blogs, community forums, and videos on the Internet has infused an element of excitement into it. Draw from all the sources you can and give the suggestions mentioned here a shot. We are sure your training sessions will improve by leaps and bounds, and your students will remember a lot more of your material than they do right now.



If you don't have passion for the content you're teaching, or if you come across bored, your students will pick up on this and it will affect the way they learn. If you aren't excited about the material, then why should they be?

