Administrate

Tips for Training Providers

Best of the Blog 2013

How to Deliver Better Training

Written by teachers, for teachers.

Calton Hill, Edinburgh

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Introduction

Hello from Scotland!

2013 has been a great year for Administrate - our training management software is now used on five continents around the world. We were also extremely proud to announce midway through the year that we'd helped our customers deliver training to over a million students.

Our Mission: Helping You Educate Better

Our software helps training providers deliver training more efficiently and effectively, but delivering quality education is more than just software and good administration. Great teaching has always had an element of art intertwined with solid fundamentals, and we are committed to doing everything we can to help people learn.

Best of Our Blog

We had a lot of fun putting together these articles, which originally ran on our blog during 2013. Each week more than 12,000 training professionals receive the latest entry, written by professional and certified educators, absolutely free of charge. You can subscribe to receive our updates throughout the year here.

Share This!

We're hopeful that you'll find this resource valuable for years to come. If you do, make sure you pass it on, and if you find yourself in Edinburgh one day in the future, make sure you stop in and say hi!

On behalf of the entire Administrate Team,

John Peebles
CEO

P.S. If you want to check out our software, you can try it for free with no strings attached! Get started here.

The 4 Training Evaluation Levels You Need to Know

A vital piece of any training should be evaluating the effectiveness of your instruction. Knowing whether or not your students understood the material you presented is valuable information, and is relatively easy to gather. Donald Kirkpatrick, past president of ASTD, suggests four levels of evaluation that should take place as part of each training:

- Reaction
- Learning
- Behaviour
- Results

Reaction – How Did You Feel?

Reaction measures how the students felt about the training on a surface level.

- Was the room comfortable?
- The presenter interesting?
- The material applicable?

The most common type of question used at the reaction level are rating scales. The feedback you receive will enable you to understand how your training was received by your audience and how to better plan for future training sessions. If a training session was not well received there are usually simple ways to fix it. For example, if your audience didn't like the space or presentation style you can tweak those things next time.

Learning – Did you Meet Your Educational Objectives?

The second level goes a bit deeper to assess whether or not your learning objectives were met. You want to make sure your audience understood and benefited from the information presented.

Ask open ended questions such as:

" How can you apply this information to your job?

What did the presenter mean by...? "

It is helpful to design these questions when you are planning the content of your training and determining the desired objectives. Be creative in the ways you assess learning objectives! You could ask participants to answer a question before every break. You might want students to summarise the information each day before going home or incorporate questions into a game. Evaluating learning objectives as the training progresses allows the presenter to immediately gauge the level of understanding and adjust accordingly.

Behaviour - Has Your Training Impacted How You Act?

The behaviour level of assessment goes deeper still and measures how your audience applies the information they have received over time. This can be assessed through follow up interviews, observation or performance reviews. Keep in mind that in order for behaviour to change, conditions must be favourable within the organisation to support such change. If a manager or boss is not supportive of or receptive to change, then an employee may not feel comfortable or may not be allowed to apply what they have learned.

Results – Did Anything Change?

Finally, measure results. This is usually the most challenging level of assessment and the most far reaching. Examples of outcomes at this level might include increased sales, higher employee retention, or reduced waste that resulted from employees participating in a specific training. Measuring results is a long term commitment that can be beneficial but is not always practical for every type of training.

Assessment is Critical, Don’t Overlook It!

Kirkpatrick’s four part model may not work perfectly for your company, but at the very minimum reaction and learning should be assessed at every training. After all, if you spend time and money you want to ensure that it was effective! When you are intentional in evaluating your training, you will be able to see areas of improvement and incorporate them into your program.

Course Evaluations, Powered by Administrate

Did you know that Administrate has an evaluation component? No training administration system would be complete without it! In just one click you can generate an evaluation form (customised to your specifications) for every course you deliver. Easily print out and distribute these evaluations, then record your feedback within Administrate for future reference and actionable information. You can track how well your instructors are performing against each course they deliver!

6 Alternative Forms of Student Assessment

It's common to be accustomed to using only one type of assessment in your classes. While there's nothing wrong with having a preferred method, try mixing it up a bit! A variety of assessments is a good thing to have in your "bag of tricks" as a teacher. Varying how you assess your students can also help students who don't respond to a particular assessment method – they may not perform well on classical test based assessments for example, but could be brilliant at presenting or writing!

1. Rubrics

In education, rubrics are a defined set of performance standards. Typically rubrics are laid out in a table with one end being the desired outcome (an example of good work) and the other end being less than desirable (an example of poor work). Students are scored based on how they fall on the continuum of expectations. Rubrics can be graded by the teacher or used as a self assessment by the student. They are a very effective and efficient way to score group projects or cooperative learning activities.

2. Writing

Often teachers stay away from writing assessments, especially in large classes since grading can take a lot of time. However, you can use short writing assignments effectively without using too much time by giving your students a prompt that they must respond to before leaving class in order to assess their understanding. Make it creative: they must keep their answer to 140 characters or less or answer in a poem or in only one sentence.

3. Presentations

Assign speaking assignments or presentations periodically. While having each student present may take a considerable amount of time, using this form of assessment is probably more realistic in terms of real world experiences than a multiple choice test. Presentations don't have to be long, but students do need to be able to speak clearly on a topic, as that is a basic life skill that everyone needs to have.

4. Discussion Boards

Many classes have online components, such as a Learning Management System (LMS), where students can post questions or interact online. Create an assessment around the online tools that you have in place. Require students to post a question and answer a question, or find an article that relates to the topic.

5. Self Assessment

Let students monitor their own progress and understanding. This can be done with checklists, a writing assignment, rubrics or even something simple like a thumbs up or thumbs down. Or, you can require students to give themselves a grade on an assignment or test when they hand it in to get a perception of their own work. Often they are very close to how you grade them!

6. Interviews

Meet briefly with each student to ask a few well planned questions. This can be done as they enter or exit class, during cooperative learning activities or other transition times. Jot down notes based on what each student says and assign a grade on their ability to explain concepts.

Troubleshooting Assessments and Tests

Training Providers – Has this Ever Happened to You?

You've taught the material that you needed to. You've had good discussion with your students, and they really seem to know their stuff. They've completed review sessions, and you've written a fair but challenging test. You're almost excited to grade the tests to see how well they've done. But while you're grading, you start noticing that many of your students did not do very well. In fact, many of them failed! The more you grade, the more frustrated you get at your students. They must not have studied well enough!

You're Not Alone – Problems with Tests Happen

At some point, every training provider has had this happen. It's very discouraging to have students fail an assessment and it's easy to blame them for being lazy or not trying hard enough. Before you pin the majority of the fault on your students, you need to reflect upon your teaching and the assessment tool first.

Here are three things you should ask yourself:

- DID I DO MY JOB? Remember, it is your job as a teacher to cause your students to learn. Did you teach in an engaging, dynamic way? Were you just trying to get through the material or were you teaching effectively? Think back through your lessons and be honest with yourself. If your teaching was the problem, go back and reteach!
- DID THE ASSESSMENT MATCH MY INSTRUCTION? It's important to make sure the assessment tool is comparable to how you taught the material. Many teachers have access to test banks, but be careful that you don't inadvertently set your students up for failure by choosing a test that is drastically different from how you presented the information.
- WHICH ASPECTS OF THE ASSESSMENT WERE THE MOST TROUBLESOME? Do an error analysis of the exam. Go through each question and tally how many students missed that particular question. If more than half of your students missed the same question, you should consider throwing it out or reteaching that area of content. One tip for those of you using Training Administration Software - you should be able to easily see how your class performed by looking at your course reports.

Don't be afraid to completely throw out a test after evaluating it's effectiveness, or lack thereof. It is absolutely acceptable to reteach and reassess until your students have gained a higher level of mastery. More often than not, if you have taught in a way that is easily understood and easily retained your students will achieve.

Conclusion

Analysing and troubleshooting assessments is a critical part of delivering quality training, and paying attention to this area will set you apart from other training providers.

Sleep: One of the Most Important Factors in Learning

What if you could give your students a better chance of learning and retaining the information taught in your classes? What if you could teach them one technique that would help them more than any review method, technique, or tool?

Spend a few minutes and teach them good sleep habits.

Sleep is Necessary for Learning

Too few people realise how important sleep is! Since the 1920s, it's been well known that sleep improves recall in learning, but it's only been in the last decade that research has illuminated the fact that sleep is necessary for learning (Stickgold 2005).

Cut Down on Sleep at Your Own Peril

According to the folks at Supermemo (a memory training program great for learning and memory retention) who have assembled what could be one of the definitive collections of sleep research on the internet, sleeping better isn't an option, it's a mandate. Their summary is clear: "By cutting down on sleep, we learn less, we develop less, we are less bright, we make worse decisions, we accomplish less, we are less productive, we are more prone to errors, and we undermine our true intellectual potential!" If you have the time, their full article is an amazing summary of the history of sleep, the state of current research, and a commentary on various sleep techniques and habits.

One of the Most Important Factors Underlying Success in Learning

Regarding the effect sleep has on learning, they state: "Sleeping well appears to be one of the most important factors underlying success in learning!"

Here are 2 core principles that won't take more than a few minutes to share with your students:

- There is only one formula for healthy and refreshing sleep: Go to sleep only when you are very tired. Not earlier. Not later. Wake up naturally without an alarm clock.
- To get sleep that maximises your learning effectiveness: go to sleep no earlier than 15-19 hours after awakening from your previous night's sleep, and make sure you go to sleep at the time of day when you usually experience a rapid increase in drowsiness (your circadian rhythm).

Improving a student's sleep habits could be one of the best things to happen to them! We're sure there's a few tired instructors out there who could benefit from these tips too!

How to Plan Great Training Sessions

Planning your training sessions is an important key to success. The following five steps can be applied to every type of instruction. Note that they are learner-centered, instead of content-centered. Start your planning by thinking about what your students need to learn in order to be more successful at their jobs. That will ensure that your training session will be practical and applicable.

1. Rationale

Your students need to know why they are attending your training. Professional development seminars are often required, but not necessarily enjoyed by the participants. A frequent complaint about training sessions is that they aren't applicable to the employee's specific job. If the students know why they are there, what they will be learning, and how it applies to their work, their interest and motivation will increase. Sharing that rationale with your students shouldn't take much time and makes for an easy introduction to your course. Remember, if you have trouble relating your training session to anything tangible, your students will too! Even very abstract concepts should be covered within a broader context. This will help keep your students motivated and focused on the overall objective.

2. Objectives

The objectives of a training session need to be clear. A student should know at the beginning what the learning objectives are and what the training session will accomplish. The objectives are more specific than the rationale and they need to be measurable. For example, a general objective is "the student will understand safety checks" or "the student will market better" whereas a measurable objective is "the student will explain all safety checks with 100% accuracy" or "the students will develop five new marketing strategies to implement." If students know specifically what is required of them they will be more likely to strive to accomplish the goals set before them.

3. Activities

Contests, games, problem solving activities, brainstorming sessions and re-teaching the material to others are all examples of effective learning activities. Instead of lecturing for hours, give your students things to do that will enhance their learning and help them learn through discovery. Make sure the activities are interesting and engaging! Even switching the delivery setting up a bit from "in-person" instruction to an online, e-learning environment (or vice versa) can do wonders for re-engaging students and helping them learn better.

4. Evaluation

In a previous blog we discussed the importance of evaluating what your students have learned. This is where you will discover how well your content was received and what level of understanding your students attained. Make sure you don't skip this step! The information you gain from evaluations will let you provide feedback to your students, our next step.

5. Feedback

Once you're aware of what your students have learned, you can either correct or confirm their knowledge. It is important to develop a way of letting your students know if they mastered the objectives or not. If you realize that certain objectives were not successfully mastered then re-teaching may need to occur.

Conclusion

These five steps can and should be applied to any teaching situation. Follow these principles to focus on your students rather than your content. You might be surprised at how quickly you start achieving better results!

4 Tips for Better Classroom Management

Planning your training sessions is an important key to success. The following five steps can be applied to every type of instruction. Note that they are learner-centered, instead of content-centered. Start your planning by thinking about what your students need to learn in order to be more successful at their jobs. That will ensure that your training session will be practical and applicable. »

Classroom Management

Classroom management isn't just for school children! Have you ever seen the following behaviours in one of your training sessions?

- Texting
- Sending emails
- Interrupting to ask questions
- Whispering to a neighbour
- Doodling
- Playing a game on a phone
- Sleeping

Hopefully you haven't had anyone fall asleep, but chances are one of the others have happened at some point! Adults can get off task as easily as a group of children and it's helpful to know some tricks to keep them engaged.

Set Expectations at the Beginning

At the beginning of your presentation, ask your students to turn off their cell phones and refrain from sending emails. This is also the time to explain how you want your presentation to go – if you will allow questions during your talk or if they should hold them until the end. Clarifying your student's role as well as your own will eliminate confusion.

Be Interesting

Holding your audience's attention is largely your responsibility. Tell stories and anecdotes and share your personal experiences. Use interesting graphics or images in your slides or short videos, if appropriate. Consider including interactive elements such as a game or competition among your participants.

Proximity Control

Often people think because they are far away from the presenter they are able to be off task and go unnoticed. While you are speaking, walk around the room. This not only keeps people's attention better but it also gently reminds the person texting in the back that they should be focused on what you are saying. You can stop by students who are off task and stay there for awhile to drive the point home!

Call on People

Occasionally there's that one person who persists in chatting with their neighbour or sending emails no matter what you do. It's acceptable to bring them into the conversation (and let them know you see what they're doing!) calling on them to answer a question or participate in some way. Usually drawing attention to them will be all that's needed to make them stop their distracting behaviour!

Remember, when students are distracting it not only affects their learning but the learning of others. Use these strategies instead of letting one person ruin a training session!

Tips for Teaching Large Classes

From logistics such as handing out papers to classroom management, teaching large classes can pose unique challenges. We'll address some of the common problems that come with large classes and offer practical solutions.

How to Personalise Large Class Experiences

Many large classes or seminars leave students feeling anonymous, which can lead to disinterest or a lack of participation. It's important to find ways to draw your students in, despite large numbers.

- Create seating charts with students' names so you can call on them by name and keep track of attendance easily if necessary. If a seating chart feels too formal, have your students wear name tags or make name plates for their desks. It's not enough to just have names displayed though, actually use them! Call on students by name, which will help boost participation and also assist with classroom management.
- Circulate throughout the room often, making eye contact with as many people as possible. This will encourage participation, especially from the people sitting way in the back! Arrive early and stay late to allow time to talk with students as they come in and leave. Make yourself available to them through office hours, by email or by consistently being able to talk before and after class.

How to Manage Material Distribution and Assignment Collection

Handing out materials, tests or other papers can take up a lot of time. So can collecting homework or in class assignments.

- Have materials ready for students to pick up as they come in to class. (If you take attendance, they can also sign in at the door!). This also works for collecting some homework assignments or graded work. However, if you distribute graded papers this way, don't put the grade on the front page for privacy sake.
- Decide upon a procedure for collecting materials before your class ever begins. Explain the procedures at the beginning of the course and then use the same process each time. For example, always have students pass papers to the end of each row and then pass forward. Doing the same procedure will cut down on explanation and keep things simple.

How to Prevent Cheating

Cheating is much easier and more common in large classes! It doesn't have to be though:

- Create different forms of tests. The questions can be the same, just put them in different order or arrangements. Distribute the different tests based on where people are sitting, so no two people near each other have the same form.

- Have a question on your test that only someone who has been in your class would know the answer. For example, if you've mentioned several times throughout the course the name of your spouse or if you always drink coffee out of a blue mug, then ask about it. That should clue you in on if someone came in to take a test for a student (or if someone is really just not paying attention!).

- Walk around the class while they're taking the test. Look for anything suspicious like students sitting closer than normal.

- Sit at the back of the class to observe students – this way they can't see you, but you can see them.

- Don't allow anything other than a pencil/pen and the test paper to be out on the desk, and think about asking students to store anything else at the back of the classroom away from their desk.

- Remind students that cheating may provide them a short term benefit, but will ultimately harm them.

Conclusion

Large classes aren't always ideal, but they can be managed to maximise their potential. Just because a class is large doesn't mean you can't be engaging and deliver a great experience, you'll just have to work a bit harder.

8 Tips for Designing Great Presentation Slides

Previously, we talked about some presentation tips for making your courses more enjoyable, more memorable, and more useful to students. Now it's time to dive into the actual mechanics of designing great slides that will make your presentation pop. Here are some tools that we find extremely valuable when designing presentations, no matter who the audience is.

Make Sure Your Presentation Material Works

The first step is to ensure you've got high quality content that engages your audience. Read about how to do this in our previous blog post. No amount of visual massaging or clever design can salvage a bad presentation. Don't skimp on this step.

Design Your Presentation Slides to Complement Your Talk

Slides should complement your talk, not the other way around. Keep your slides simple and design them to reinforce the major point you're making. Don't list all of your points and then read them one by one for your audience – this encourages "zoning out" as the audience will read ahead of you, get bored waiting for you to catch up, and ultimately stop listening. Instead, design your slides so they communicate a few words or part of a thought that requires your audience to listen to what you're saying.

Use a Professionally Designed Colour Palette

Colour may be more important than you realise, and is a great way to make your presentation stand out and give it a professional edge. We recommend using a high contrast, bright palette to make your slides stand out and easier to read from the back of the room. Here are two great tools that will help you find a colour palette that will make your slides pop:

- ColourLovers.com – quickly search and find palettes, and sort by popularity or create your own.
- Adobe Kuler – although this site requires flash, it's a great resource if you're not finding something you like and includes a creation tool and the ability to search, share, and rate palettes made by others.

Spend Some Time Choosing a Font

The right typeface can really set your slides apart by influencing the visual feel of your presentation in a subtle, yet noticeable way. Don't choose a font that is instantly recognisable by your audience! This doesn't have to be a laborious process, simply head over to DaFont.com which has a great selection of free fonts that are organised by theme.

Supersize Your Text

For presentations to groups, larger text is always better. When in doubt, go bigger. Remove words if you have to, or use more slides. We recommend a minimum of 50pt text for presentations, and often go much larger (90+ point or even over 200 point when we can). The above example is using a combination of 250 point text and 80 point text. This accomplishes two things:

- It ensures your audience can see everything on every slide.
- It constrains our available space, forcing our slides to complement our talk (see above) which keeps our audience more engaged.

A more engaged audience that can see everything you're presenting is a major win-win!

Quickly Find Great Images for your Presentation

Great visuals can really enhance a presentation, but it's often hard to find high quality, relevant, royalty free images to incorporate into your talk. We recommend giving CompFight.com a try as it makes it easy to quickly search and filter image results by license. They even have a WordPress plugin that you can add to make finding and incorporating images even easier for those who use the WordPress platform to manage their website.

"We recommend a minimum of 50pt text for presentations, and often go much larger"

Easily Incorporate Online Video

Never add a video to your presentation that will require internet access to play! This is a cringeworthy mistake we see all too often. There's not much worse than seeing an audience and presenter suffer through poor quality, jerky video due to a venue's poor or unpredictable internet connection. If you need to add a video from Youtube or Vimeo, use KeepVid to download it for you (remember to respect content creator's rights and copyright restrictions).

Get Inspired with Great Presentation Examples

It's always helpful to see examples of fantastic presentations that incorporate the above principles. Note & Point is a gallery of excellent presentations that will inspire you to raise the bar on your own content!

This Will Take Some Time

Just like great authors, great presenters don't always follow every rule every time, and it's OK to break a few here and there. The key is to be mindful of these guidelines from an overall perspective, and spend time on your presentation. Nothing replaces the effort required to turn a good presentation into a great presentation, so make sure you set aside adequate time for preparation.

Realise the Power of Expectations

Expecting great things from your students is an important aspect of teaching. How you view your students and the expectations you set for them could make or break both your teaching experience and their learning experience. Before we discuss how to set realistic expectations it is important to realise how powerful they are.

The Power of Expectations

Several years ago a doctor named Irving Kirsch began studying the placebo effect and how it related to antidepressant medication. He performed a double blind study where both the doctors and patients were not aware if they received real medication or a placebo pill. Surprisingly, the effects of the real medication were not considerably more beneficial than the sugar pill. The people who took the placebo had around the same decrease in depression as the people who took the real drugs. How did this happen? People felt better because they thought they were being prescribed a drug. They expected for the drug to alleviate their depression and their body and mind responded accordingly.

Expectations Affect Performance

Our own expectations of a situation can dramatically affect our performance and physical well being. As a teacher, you need to realise the power of your own expectations for a class or seminar that you are supposed to teach. If you are disgruntled about teaching a particular subject or group of students your expectations will drop and the class will probably not go as smoothly or be as interesting as it could be. On the other hand, if you are excited about teaching your enthusiasm will permeate the class and infect your students. More often than not, students will rise to meet your expectations if they know you are behind them and believe in them.

Coming Up Next: Developing Realistic and Effective Expectations

Since positive expectations are so important, next time we'll look at how to develop realistic and effective expectations for your students. Stay tuned and make sure you subscribe to our mailing list to make sure you don't miss anything!

Building Positive Expectations of Your Students

Since expectations are so powerful, it is important to build positive ones that surround your students. By setting the correct expectations of your students, you'll be a better educator and your students will get more out of your training sessions. There are four main ways that people develop expectations: recognition, reputation, record, relationship.

Let's explore each one with regards to the expectations you develop about your students.

- Recognition
- Reputation
- Record
- Relationship

Recognition

This is a surface level reaction to seeing a student and making a judgement call about them. These expectations are based on their appearance or something you've heard them say. While it may be instinctive to make a judgement call about someone right away, it is important to not let your first impression dictate a negative opinion about a student. Appearances and first impressions can be deceiving, and you don't want to foster low or negative expectations of someone without much information.

Reputation

Often teachers hear good or bad things about their students before they even set foot in the classroom. This can be detrimental or beneficial, depending on the person's reputation! Try to take what you hear with a grain of salt, and don't jump to conclusions about a student based on another person's experience with them. This goes both ways and applied to flattery and negative feedback. It is always best to make your own conclusions after having interacted with a person for awhile.

Record

Looking at a student's grades, IQ, performance record or sales data can influence what you think about them. If you see a person who has terrible attendance at work you might be tempted to jump to a negative conclusion about them. Keep in mind that records are rarely the whole picture and there might be other factors at play. Look over necessary records, but don't let that be the driving force in what you expect of someone. If you're looking for a great way to manage your records, you might be interested in exploring a training administration system like Administrate to help you get rid of your spreadsheets.

Relationship

This is the most meaningful way to develop expectations of someone. Once you have a relationship with a person, it is more realistic to know what to expect from them and what is unrealistic. Determining what someone is capable of once you know them is the most effective way to build realistic expectations. If you get side tracked by their reputation or record, you may never get to the point where you can build a good relationship!

Conclusion

Obviously building relationships with your students can take time that you may not have before a class or seminar begins. It is important to have realistic expectations using what you do know about your students (through recognition, reputation and record) but also know when to adjust them (through relationship). If you realise halfway through a class that your expectations are unattainably high, then you need to change. However, it is imperative that you communicate your new expectations (and why you changed them) to your students. We'll discuss that next!

Communicating Expectations to Students

We've discussed the power of expectations and how to develop positive ones. But you can't stop there! It's important to actually let your students know what you expect of them, and then make sure your non-verbal communication lines up with your expectations.

The easiest way to communicate with your students what you expect of them is to clearly tell them. There are several simple ways to do this:

- give a written syllabus with expectations, assignments, assessments listed
- hand out agendas at the beginning of a seminar
- list expectations at the beginning slides of your presentation
- clearly outline them in the course overview

Now that you have distinctly communicated what you expect to your students, you must ensure that your actions, words and body language line up with what you expect. Don't tell your students that you expect great things and then act like you know they will fail. Keep these following principles in mind.

Teachers with Low Expectations:

- don't give enough wait time for a student to answer a question
- call on students (or a particular student) less frequently
- interrupt students when they make mistakes give students the answers without guiding them through problem solving methods
- dismiss students' opinions or answers if they don't line up with the teacher's
- fail to use questioning as a teaching tool
- criticize students for failure
- treat certain students with less respect

Do you see how these actions, albeit subtle, can lead a student to realise that the teacher does not expect great things from them? Be careful that you are doing things that communicate your high expectations.

Teachers with High Expectations:

- listen to and affirm responses from all students
- lead incorrect answers to the right conclusions through guided questioning
- maintain eye contact with students, especially while they are speaking
- give positive feedback on students' responses
- use positive nonverbal communication such as smiling, nodding in agreement, leaning forward, etc.
- allow time for students to problem solve before giving them feedback

Conclusion

Teach and interact with your students in a way that encourages them to rise to meet your high expectations. Be aware of how your actions communicate what you expect of your students, and act accordingly.

Logistics & Training: 4 Vital Aspects

In 2010 UPS launched a global advertising campaign about logistics. Their focus was celebrating the logistics that all companies face, regardless of how big or small the company is. UPS concentrated their advertising on showing how smoothly they are able to help business owners solve logistical problems. From shipping packages to online printing to technology support, UPS makes sure they have their customers covered. As teachers, training providers, and training administrators, we can learn an important lesson from UPS and their focus on logistics: a seemingly simple but very vital step.

Logistics and Training

Logistics is an important part of teaching and training. It is essential to think through logistical challenges that might arrive and be prepared to find solutions before you begin to teach. Otherwise, the wonderful lesson or seminar you planned could be thwarted by problems that may have simple solutions. When thinking through teaching logistics here are some things to consider:

1. Space

Ideally, you will have an opportunity to see the room where you'll be teaching beforehand. Check out how the room is set up and make sure it will work for you.

- Can all the participants see well?
- Are there enough chairs and/or tables? Think through your lesson and make sure the space is appropriate for your planned activities.
- If you want your students to work in groups, is the seating arrangement structured for group work?
- Will you need to move furniture at different points in the day for various parts of your lesson?

2. Technology & Materials

The use of technology can greatly aid a presentation, but it can also be an area where challenges are common. Make sure you check on the available technology in the room beforehand, and test to see if it works! It is always a good idea to have a backup plan, just in case. It is also wise to take a paper copy of your lesson plan or notes so you are adequately prepared in case the technology fails.

Think about the materials you may want to hand out to your students:

- Who is in charge of making copies?
- Do you want your students to have copies of your slides or take notes on their own paper?
- Would you prefer your students to wear name tags?

3. Comfort Level

Put yourself in the shoes of your students and spend a few minutes thinking about the comfort level of the environment.

- Are the chairs comfortable?
- How is the temperature of the room?
- Will refreshments be provided?

If the space you are teaching in is uncomfortable, you may need to structure your lesson differently to allow for movement breaks. You do not want your audience losing focus because they are uncomfortable!

4. Time

Make sure you know the allotted amount of time that you have to teach. Have a clock or watch visible so you can pace yourself accordingly. Plan breaks every so often to keep your students engaged and to minimise distractions. Allow plenty of time for lunch, especially if people need to travel somewhere to buy food.

Conclusion

These things might seem trivial, but if one of them goes wrong it can sabotage your whole lesson! It is not worth all your planning and hard work for avoidable problems to derail what you have to say. Be prepared and think through the logistics.

It's worth mentioning that tracking resources like classrooms, technology, and materials is just one of the great things that a training administration system can help you with. You can run your training operation just like UPS, which uses advanced and powerful software to help them with their global logistical challenges, except you'll be using training administration software built just for you – check it out!

6 Ways to Show Students You Care

If we think back to our own academic experiences, most can remember a few teachers who stood out, and many times the reason is simply because they cared enough to invest additional time and effort. Most people learn more from teachers they like, and would have gladly taken more courses from them if at all possible.

Showing Students You Care: An Opportunity

There's an opportunity here for training providers (both commercial and internal trainers).

- **Commercial Trainers** Showing you care can get better results from learners, increase recurring business from students and companies that love the training they're receiving, and make your training company stand out when compared against others.
- **Internal Training Departments** Want to break through the "mandatory training" mental barrier and get your workforce interested in additional course offerings and skills? Going the extra mile by showing your students you care could be just the ticket!

1. Make it Personal

- **Track and Respond to Common Learning Styles** Everyone has a different learning style. Depending on which model you subscribe to, survey your students (or be attentive to clues they provide) and record how they learn best. Within Administrate, you could record this information against their contact profile using a custom field. Now make sure you tailor the course materials or your classroom delivery to the various learning styles attending your course. This can also impact your marketing or awareness building efforts in the future - visual learners will respond better to visual marketing materials, for example.

- **Send a Handwritten Note** You'd be amazed at how rare a handwritten note is these days, until you stop to think about the last time you received one! Yes, it can be a bit time consuming, but this will certainly stick in your student's minds and demonstrate a personal touch!

- **Get Creative** people know when they're being fed the normal diet of content. Doing something that doesn't seem normal or something that's more creative than the normal classroom routine will certainly provide a touch that gets noticed. Find out what topics your students like, or what current events they're interested in – now make all your instruction examples refer to those topics with using your students as characters when appropriate. This will again help in future marketing efforts if you want to include a personal note and you can store this information against the contact record within Administrate using a custom field.

3. Don't Let Red Tape Get You in a Bind

Rules are rules, but don't lose sight of why policies and procedures were put in place, and take care that you're not making your customers or students wade through red tape that can frustrate them. When you see a reasonable opportunity to make an exception, going above and beyond with a student will be a massively positive experience for them.

4. Provide Additional Value

After your courses are finished, or even while your class is still attending your training, make sure you find a few ways to provide value above and beyond your course offering. This can be as simple as adding in some additional resources that aren't typically included or expected. Something more elaborate might be an invitation to a free happy hour at your training centre or classrooms, or a free invite to an additional training session covering a related subject. Even things unrelated to your course like coupons to local eateries, a list of the best places to park, or email reminders the day before a class will say a lot to your students and will drastically improve their experience.

5. Inspire Your Students

Inspiration can be hard to come by sometimes, particularly when people are busy or taking night classes. Everyone has pressures in life. One of your jobs should be to inspire your students! Start building a library of inspirational content and share a bit of it at the start of every class. Help students visualise how your training and their new skills will help them. Introduce them to examples of what it looks like to be the best in their field. Share inspirational segments from movies or quotes or posters. Just be careful you don't overdo it, as this could backfire and cause students to lose interest! Inspiration doesn't have to be manufactured or delivered via props or media either – it can be as simple as asking a former student to come back for an interview in front of the class (or even better, showing a film of that interview which you can use over and over). You could also share anecdotes from your own career.

6. Challenge Them

Lastly, a personal touch that will live on past whatever course you're delivering today is a challenge to your students. For those students who are tops in your course (or even those that are clearly bored or not applying themselves), figure out a way to challenge them. This can be subtle, such as saying there's an option to do additional assignments while commenting that "only the top 1% of students choose to". This kind of motivation will grab normally disinterested students who are competitive. You can be more overt in your challenges by offering an advanced student the opportunity to move up to a more difficult course or providing a free course registration as a prize. Spend a bit of time challenging your students and they'll remember you for ever.

Conclusion

Demonstrating to your trainees that you care isn't easy. It does take a bit more time and it's not always cheap, but when done well it can be the defining difference maker within your training business or internal training department.

We recommend leveraging your training administration system as much as possible when implementing these techniques, that way, your customer database can become a long-term knowledge asset that transcends specific course offerings. Don't implement these ideas without a way to record them against your students and clients or you'll miss out on future opportunities!

Do you have any great stories or experiences to share on how caring for your students made all the difference? Send them to info [at] getadministrate.com and we'll share them on this blog!

Boost Retention of Your Training Courses with “See One, Do, Teach One”

One of the best ways to boost retention of any topic you’re teaching is to turn the tables on your students and ask them to teach what they’ve just learned to each other. In other words, your class can improve how they learn through teaching the concept to someone else!

See One, Do One, Teach One

This idea isn't new, but it's not often used in standard courses. The "See One, Do One, Teach One" method is a core component of the philosophy of Experiential Education (not to be confused with experiential learning), most famously expressed by John Dewey in his 1938 book, Experience and Education.

Used heavily within medical schools, this technique is often employed within skill based courses, but you can use this technique in almost any educational setting.

An Example

Here's an example of how you could implement the "See One, Do One, Teach One" technique:

- See: Explain and demonstrate the concept in front of the class (or cover the topic through your E-Learning course).
- Do: Now provide a few exercises that your students can undertake, which reinforces the teaching you've just provided. E-Learners should be able to do a few problems or quizzes via the Learning Management System.
- Teach: Divide the class into "learners" and "teachers" and pair students up with each other. Most LMSs will have collaboration facilities to help students interact online, or you could assign a homework problem that requires them to teach you via writing. Ask students who are "learning" to ask reasonable questions to make sure the teacher understands. Now switch the roles and repeat. Ask the class to save any questions that came up which couldn't be answered to be covered by the entire class.

Classroom Implementation Tips

Here's a few easy ways you can incorporate experiential education into some of your course offerings:

- Assign your students homework that requires them to explain a concept to each other outside of class. Or, if your concept isn't too technical, to explain to a family member, partner, or someone else not enrolled in the class.
- For skill based courses, make sure you can easily provide students with the practice tools and equipment that may be necessary.
- If you offer the same course to multiple classes at the same time, you could have one class instruct the other and vice versa.
- As part of an examination, the instructor can be "taught" the concept orally.

Summary

Experiential education doesn't replace all forms of education, and should be used judiciously on core concepts, but you'll find yourself surprised at how beneficial this simple technique is to someone learning a complex or detailed concept.

Make Your Courses More Memorable, Enjoyable, and Useful

1. Boil Your Presentation Down to One Thing

Before presenting, it's important to identify the one or two key things (no more than 3) that you want people to retain from the session. To a training provider used to juggling and imparting many complex concepts during a typical training session, this may seem like counter-intuitive advice. Don't students want the most value from each training session? However, stop and reflect on the many presentations, lectures, books, and religious services you may have experienced: how many of them can you remember today? If you're like most, you'll be able to remember just a few, and even then you'll remember just one or two main points.

Even with courses or classes that are weeks in length on very technical subjects you should be able to boil each session down to 1-2 main themes that will help students retain what you're teaching. If they remember the theme, it'll serve as a marker within their mental model to go back and find the detailed information.

2. Tell a Story

Facts, figures, and statistics are informative, but are hard to remember and are often boring. Reinforce your 1-2 themes with a story and you'll find that retention and interest skyrocket. The fact is that humans love stories, and while the reasons why are still being researched, the consensus seems to be that a narrative resonates with humans because we love to make sense of the world we're in and stories provide this vehicle. By sprinkling your presentation and subject materials with stories that reinforce your major themes, you're providing mental hooks that will captivate and interest your listeners.

Even if your subject matter is very dry, spend a bit of time seeing how your themes can be reinforced with anecdotes or examples from everyday life.

Juxtapositions of seemingly unrelated topics generate interest and provide people with a memorable experience. Try juxtaposing hobbies with your subject matter, for example, "What does motorcycle racing have to do with software development?". To get some inspiration, try the following Google Search: "what does * have to do with *" and check out the results. Plenty of them are memorable, and many relate concepts that are surprising, interesting, and as a result, memorable!

Stories from your personal life, famous figures in history, or even stories you've heard from friends can all be incorporated. Even if you can't find a story that fits well, craft a story about the situation you'd find yourself in to make the points you're discussing relevant. For example, when we demonstrate Administrate to clients, we often tell a simple story along the lines of, "Imagine a training provider sitting in their office, surrounded by paper, fighting with an Excel spreadsheet, hurriedly trying to email a list of prospects and get a few invoices sent just before their next class begins – our training administration software is designed to prevent this!" That's way more powerful than "Administrate is training administration software with features x, y, and z!"

3. Answer Who, What, When, Where, Why?

One of the key things in any presentation is to make sure you pass the basic journalistic test of: Who, What, When, Where, Why?

Who: Who is your course or presentation designed for?

What: What exactly are you communicating, teaching, conveying, or selling?

When: Is what you're communicating available now? Do I need to wait to implement it? What's the best situation to use this information or product?

Where: In what context is this information relevant or valuable?

Why: Why listen to your presentation? Articulate how your course, information, or presentation will improve the lives of your listeners, (or keep them out of jail, or make them additional money). What exactly will the knowledge that you're transferring to your students do for them?

Providing the answers to these questions means you're providing your audience with a well covered topic. Sometimes one or two of these questions aren't applicable, but fail to answer a majority and you'll leave questions lingering in your students' minds.

4. Practice

This tip seems obvious but you'd be surprised how many people never practice their presentation, even important ones! Practicing a presentation can seem awkward, annoying, and we're all busy so time can be an issue, but as any instructor who has taught the same class back-to-back can attest to, the second time through the material is always better than the first! Because performing in front of a live audience can be weird (for both you and your guinea pig), we suggest presenting in a quiet room in front of a video camera. This will give you a chance to review yourself, make notes, and see how your audience will observe you. Don't worry, everyone's voice sounds weird to themselves, and everyone is a bit self conscious! We promise your presentation will improve and your students will thank you later.

5. Lastly, Share!

Lastly, after you've delivered your well practiced, awesome presentation that tells stories in support of your main themes while clearly answering the key questions, make sure you share your material (if appropriate). If your presentation was filmed, get it up on YouTube with a bit of editing. If you can, share your slides or notes and email the link to your attendees. This will be one last point of reinforcement and will be something tangible that your audience can take with them and refer to in the future.

Now get out there and present!

Bring Your Courses Online with A Learning Management System

We've been hard at work on the beta testing of our new Cloud Learning Management System! Over the last few months we've been focused on things like content testing, stress testing, UI tweaks, more branding options, and a host of other little changes and features. We're getting excited about our upcoming launch!

Before we officially announce our launch, we wanted to make sure we talked a bit about why traditional "offline" training providers might want to explore offering E-Learning via our LMS.

Why Use E-Learning if You're a Traditional Training Provider?

We believe E-Learning is a great option for almost any training provider. Even if you have hands on instruction requirements, E-Learning can be a powerful reinforcement tool that you can provide to your students "out of hours" to bolster your in-class instruction.

Here's a few ways you can use E-Learning to add value to your courses:

- Reinforce classroom materials.
- Provide supplemental information and instruction.
- Quizzes, review tools, and practice tests.
- Test taking or certificate renewal.
- As bonus content for students, to help you differentiate yourself from you competitors.

Don't Let These Reasons Stop You From Exploring E-Learning

Many of our clients don't use a Learning Management System (LMS) today, but these reasons shouldn't stop you from exploring E-Learning!

- Onsite Instruction Required: Maybe you're teaching a very hands-on topic that requires specific tools, environments, or some kind of physical interaction.
- Unsure of Requirements: Perhaps you don't know what's involved in creating the content required to bring your courses online. Don't worry, designing E-Learning content is much easier than you might think!
- Price: LMS options can be expensive, and the price may be putting you off! Our LMS is designed to be cost effective, and you only pay for what you need, with no long-term commitments.
- No Time: You don't have time to buy, install, and configure software, let alone learn how to use it! Our LMS is delivered via the cloud and is automatically activated for you.

It's Easier to Get Started than You Think!

Getting started with E-Learning won't be as hard as you think. Follow these steps to get started:

- Get an LMS – If you're already an Administrate customer, just contact us to activate our LMS, which is already setup on your account. Want to try it out and aren't an Administrate customer? Just signup for a free trial!
- Get a SCORM File – You'll need an industry-standard SCORM file for our LMS. Grab one of your presentations and find an authoring tool which will help you convert your PowerPoint or paper quizzes to online versions. Here's a quick overview of some well known E-Learning Authoring Tools, some of which are free!
- Activate Your Online Courses – Upload your newly created SCORM files to your LMS, add yourself as a delegate, and check out your new online course!

- Plan Your Future Offerings – If you're using an Administrate online course booking option, you can immediately offer your courses online. You may want to do this, or you may want to invest in some additional content creation and refinement. The rest is up to you!

E-Learning Shouldn't be a Threat to Training Providers

We strongly believe that E-Learning and traditional classroom based education complement each other. Using Administrate, you can quickly and easily offer both types of courses to your students without missing a beat!

A Quick Tour of SCORM Authoring Tools

If you're looking to provide E-Learning to your students, you'll pretty quickly run into questions and references surrounding SCORM. The Shareable Content Object Reference Model (SCORM) is a specification that means you:

- Can play content in more than one Learning Management System
- Provides a standard set of interfaces between your students working their way through your content and the LMS.

Put simply, think of an LMS as your DVD player, and your SCORM content as the DVD. But how do you create SCORM compatible content? »

Create SCORM Content with an Authoring Tool

To author SCORM content you'll need an Authoring Tool. There are several options here, ranging from the very expensive and featureful to free and much less powerful. We don't recommend any specific authoring tool, but we do recommend that you make sure you have the following features available when choosing which tool you use:

- SCORM Compliant – make sure your authoring tool emits truly SCORM compatible and compliant content (either SCORM 1.2 or SCORM2004). If you have any doubt whether your content will work, you're welcome to test it within the Administrate LMS, or there are free testing tools provided by SCORM Cloud.
- HTML5 Output – SCORM was originally mostly delivered using Flash, which means that iOS devices can't play the content, as they don't support Flash. Most authoring tools now provide a way to emit HTML5 content which means your iOS using mobile students can use your content.
- Internationalisation – if your content will be translated into multiple languages, make sure your authoring tool supports the languages you will need.
- Compatible Computing Platform – many SCORM authoring packages are Windows only, but Mac options do exist. Mac users can often run authoring packages using VMWare or Parallels, but it's good to know ahead of time if this will be a requirement.
- Do You Need Quizzing or Testing? Some E-Learning courses don't require testing or assessment of students. If you need this, pay special attention to the options that the Authoring Tool you select provides.

Some Popular Options Our Customers Use

Here are some of the most popular options our customers use with Administrate LMS (in no particular order). All of the non-free products offer free trials so you can try them out and make sure they work for you.

- Microsoft Learning Essentials – a free add-on to Windows based office products, you can convert your Office docs to SCORM files.
- Articulate – Very fully featured option that supports internationalisation.
- Adobe Captivate – Another very fully feature option that's very popular.
- Camtasia – Mac and Windows options available, got their start in the screen recording segment. Testing only available with Windows version.

Check out E-Learning 24/7s extremely in-depth reviews of Learning Management Systems and SCORM Authoring packages here for even more information, reviews, and rankings to help you make an informed decision!

5 Keys to Designing Great E-Learning Content

Great E-Learning content is a must when delivering education via a Learning Management System (LMS). Content can be bought, or you can create your own using a SCORM authoring package. When creating E-Learning content, make sure you follow these 5 keys to success.

1. Focus on Content Above All Else

This should be a no-brainer, but when authoring E-Learning content it can be easy to get distracted by your authoring package with all the design and multimedia options at your fingertips. Resist the temptation to just dive in and begin creating content! Instead, take a step back and construct a clear outline of your course. For a great E-Learning course outline, we recommend including the following at a minimum:

- Course objectives
- Prerequisites (if any)
- Intended audience
- Evaluation criteria
- Recommended pace (or schedule)
- How to get help
- Further Learning Avenues
- Your main course content

At the end of the day, content will make or break the success of your online course offering, so make sure this is where you invest the majority of your attention and time.

2. Quality Design and Presentation Does Matter

While content is the most important aspect of a quality E-Learning offering, design shouldn't be totally ignored. We recommend leveraging existing design templates that may be available from your SCORM content authoring tool. If a custom template that fits your exact needs is required, enlist the help of a design professional, but make sure you engage them after the majority of your content has been assembled so they can appreciate the wider picture. Make sure that any audio or video work is professionally recorded or done using professional techniques. Things don't have to be perfect, but they do need to reflect a high level of quality, or people may be distracted from your great content by your poor design.

3. Create a Clear Educational Context

One of the things that separates experts from novices is their appreciation of the educational context surrounding their subject of expertise. An expert will be able to not only articulate the concepts and particulars directly relating to the subject in question, they'll also be knowledgeable about tertiary ideas and the historical development of the subject. One of the best things you can do for your students is provide them this context as much as possible while going through a course. Try breaking the explanation of contextual topics down and spreading them out throughout your course so as not to overwhelm. This is also a great way to introduce your students to other courses you may provide or pique their interest in further study!

4. Test and Iterate

Once you have a rough draft of your E-Learning content assembled, compile it into a SCORM object, upload to your Learning Management System, and invite some friends, coworkers, or former students to take the course and provide feedback. Some training organisations provide deeply discounted rates to previous students when testing new content. Others pay experts to review their content for mistakes or areas of concern. Pay particular attention to quiz and test results and look for patterns that may indicate students are struggling to answer certain questions – this could be either due to poor explanation, a poorly written text question, or both. Make sure you regularly incorporate feedback throughout this process and deliver the changes to the person or persons who reported the issue.

5. Provide Quality Supplementary Resources

Throughout the learning experience, make sure you assemble and curate a highly relevant list of complementary and supplementary resources. We recommend dividing these lists into two types:

- Complementary resources which are necessary for students to review and learn.
- Supplementary resources which aren't necessary but to help provide more educational context.

These resources can be Powerpoint presentations, videos, E-Books, external publications, interview transcripts, news articles, opinion pieces, podcasts, images, audio, and just about anything else you can think of which will assist the learner in their education journey. Get creative! Remember to review and update this list of resources periodically, and for web resources in particular, make sure you check for broken our outdated links!

Conclusion

Creating fantastic e-learning content to distribute via a Learning Management System can be time consuming and frustrating at times. Don't worry, those feelings are normal. Keep sight of your goal, iterate your course in response to feedback, and you'll be delivering high quality education via the web in no time!

Easily Assess Learning Styles for Better Student Outcomes

The learning styles your students possess are one of most important factors impacting their success in the classroom. Most adults are not aware of their own learning styles or which multiple intelligence fits them best. If they took an assessment while in school, chances are they either forgot or their learning style has changed slightly as they've gotten older. Not only does this information benefit you as a trainer, it also empowers your students to know more about how they learn and process information.

> "Learning Styles are simply how people learn successfully"

Learning Styles and Multiple Intelligences

As a training provider, you'll want to make sure you know each student's learning style and multiple intelligences. A common misconception is that learning styles and multiple intelligences are the same. You may have heard people incorrectly use the terms interchangeably. They are actually very different!

Learning Styles are simply how people learn successfully. How a person prefers to concentrate and stores or remembers new information is their learning style. The three main learning styles are:

- Auditory
- Visual
- Kinesthetic

Multiple Intelligences refer to how people process information to solve problems or create products. There are eight widely accepted intelligences, and often people have overlap between several areas. The 8 Intelligences include:

- Musical
- Bodily-kinesthetic
- Interpersonal
- Verbal-linguistic
- Logical-mathematical
- Naturalistic
- Intrapersonal
- Visual-spatial

How do You Differentiate?

An easy way to differentiate between learning styles and multiple intelligences is to think of learning styles as "input" and multiple intelligences as "output". A person uses their learning style to listen to and remember information. Their type of intelligence is used when they apply the information previously learned.

How to Quickly Assess Your Student's Learning Styles and Multiple Intelligences

Understanding how your students learn is a vital part of teaching effectively. This is especially true for extended or ongoing training courses. It is worth the time and effort to gather information about how your students learn so you can be as productive as possible. Have your students take a learning style inventory when registering for your course (see below or click here). This allows you to know a little about your students before you step into the classroom, and enables you to plan your presentation accordingly. For example, if you realise your students are mainly kinesthetic learners then you'll need to teach differently than if you have a group of visual learners.

Understanding how your students process information comes into play when there is a specific goal or project that your class is working toward. Use the free assessment tool below, or click here to measure each student in your class. You should assign people to tasks where their strengths are utilised in order to ensure success. For example, if you are teaching salespeople how to best make a sale, incorporate strategies that line up with their particular intelligences. If you know Fred is a logical-mathematical thinker, then he should reason with his customers about the logic behind purchasing his product. Your students can discover how they apply information best by taking a multiple intelligence assessment.

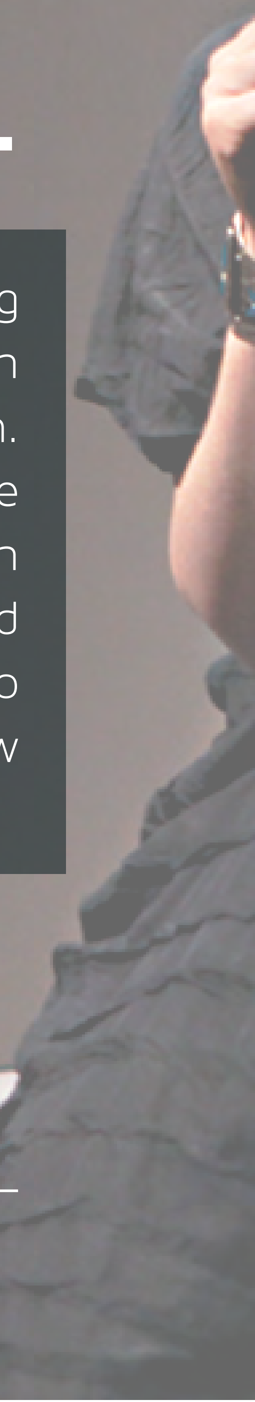
- Free Learning Style Assessment
- Free Multiple Intelligences Assessment

Track and Tailor for Learning Styles, and See Your Students Succeed.

Once you have this information about your students, make sure you record it within your training administration system against each student record! This information will help you improve pass rates, be valuable information for those students who take multiple courses from you, and be a valuable insight for the student to know about themselves!

How to Teach to Different Learning Styles

Previously we've discussed what learning styles are, how they are different from multiple intelligences, and how to assess both. Remember, learning styles are how people learn successfully. There are three main types of learning styles – visual, auditory and kinesthetic. It's important to know how to recognise students' learning styles and know how to teach each type.



We've broken each learning style down into:

- Characteristics – watch for these to see if your students are exhibiting these behaviours. These are clues to their learning style.
- Teaching Strategies – how to adapt your presentations and training sessions to each learning style for maximum effect.
- Learning Strategies – encourage your students to try these strategies when studying information or preparing for an assessment.

Visual Learners

Visual learners need to associate ideas, concepts, data and other information with images and techniques.

Characteristics

- Observes rather than talking or acting
- Not very distractable
- Notices details
- Memorizes by seeing graphics or pictures
- Enjoys advance planning
- Struggles with verbal instructions
- Typically has good handwriting and is a good speller

Teaching Strategies

- Seat your visual learners close to the front, where they can see the presenter clearly
- Include meaningful visual aids to support your verbal instruction
- Use colours to cue important information
- Encourage note taking

Learning Strategies

- Recopy notes while studying. This can be done several times if necessary.
- Visualise the information or how to solve a problem
- Look at the words, visualise the words in your mind, repeat them to yourself.

Auditory Learners

Auditory learning is a learning style in which a person learns through listening. Auditory learners need to hear what is being said in order to understand and may have difficulty with written instructions.

Characteristics

- Talks to self
- Easily distracted
- Enjoys music, hums or sings often
- Enjoys being read to or listening to audio books
- Struggles with written instructions
- Likes to talk

Teaching Strategies

- Seat auditory learners away from distractions
- Use good expression when speaking- don't be monotonous!
- Have students repeat important information
- Incorporate songs or catchy phrases into your presentation
- Learning Strategies
- Repeat facts or information aloud while studying
- Explain or teach information to others

- Brainstorm or study aloud with others
- Say words inside your head to remember them

Kinesthetic Learners

Kinesthetic (also called Tactile) Learning is a learning style in which learning takes place by the student carrying out a physical activity, rather than listening to a lecture or watching a demonstration.

Characteristics

- Frequently in motion- shaking legs, drumming fingers, etc.
- Often touches people while talking
- Enjoys solving problems by physically working through them
- Will try new things, is very outgoing
- Reading and spelling not a priority

Teaching Strategies

- Seat them towards the back of the room so their motion does not distract others
- Have frequent movement breaks
- Incorporate role play into your instruction
- Use models and real objects for visual aids and pass them around to the students

Learning Strategies

- Take frequent breaks when studying to get up and move around
- Pace back and forth while studying
- Eliminate distracting objects from your desk
- Draw information while learning it

How to Teach to All Three Learning Styles

Most likely you will have a good mix of all three learning styles in your class. It is highly encouraged to incorporate teaching methods that will benefit each type of learner. Instead of just orally presenting use role play, audience participation and even music to convey information. Give your students guided notes to fill in the blanks and use visuals in your slides. Have your students reteach the information to their neighbour or a small group of people. Not only will your training session be more interesting, your audience will probably learn better!

A Cooperative Learning Primer

What is Cooperative Learning?

Cooperative learning is a teaching method where small groups of learners work collaboratively towards a goal. It can be a very effective teaching model that allows students to interact with each other and be an active participant in their learning. Not all situations warrant a cooperative learning model though, so we'll explore the advantages and disadvantages of this teaching method.

Advantages to Cooperative Learning

- Students actively participate in their education by exploring and learning from each other. They are able to experience a wide range of thoughts and opinions on a subject from working with their peers. More importantly, they arrive at their own conclusions after having done research or exploring a topic thoroughly.
- Students are able to practice and hone social skills such as working in a group, resolving conflict, problem solving, and taking directions from a peer leader to name a few. These important, life long skills are needed in the workplace but are rarely practiced in a typical lecture style classroom.
- Cooperative learning is a teaching model that is heavily supported by research as being very effective. It can be used along with a variety of other teaching strategies, which we'll address in a later post.
- The teacher becomes a facilitator instead of a lecturer. They can work with the small groups individually, assisting and intervening when needed.
- A deeper level of understanding can take place within groups as students delve into subjects they are interested in.
- Groups can be assigned topics based on skill level or difficulty. This form of differentiation enables students of all abilities to be successful, even if their subjects or products may be different from their peers'.

Disadvantages to Cooperative Learning

- Not all students work well with others, and may cause conflict within a group. This can potentially sabotage a cooperative learning environment.
- Not all lessons are ideal for group work. Easy or straightforward concepts may not be as interesting or successful in a cooperative learning assignment.

- Groups will finish at different times. This can add a layer of classroom management complexity for the instructor.
- Cooperative learning groups can create a level of noise within the classroom that the teacher might not be comfortable with, or know how to manage well.
- Some students may not do their fair share of work, or certain students may monopolise the task. This can lead to challenging grading situations for the teacher.

We will address many of these disadvantages in the coming series of posts, and discuss how to work around these challenging aspects. We'll also look at which class situations are most suitable for cooperative learning methods. Stay tuned!

Explore the Three Types of Cooperative Learning

Previously, we defined cooperative learning and looked at some advantages and disadvantages of using this teaching method. When determining if cooperative learning is a method appropriate for your lesson, it's important to understand the various kinds.

There are three main types of cooperative learning groups: informal learning groups, formal cooperative groups and cooperative base groups. We'll define each and discuss the best situation to use each type of group.

Informal Learning Groups

These groups are short term and not very structured. They typically involve activities where classmates turn to a neighbour to discuss a problem or concept for a few minutes. Informal groups are generally small, usually two but no more than three people. It's most convenient to use informal learning groups for quick activities such as checking for understanding, brainstorming, quick problem solving, summarising, or review. These groups are a great way to change up a lecture format by giving students a few minutes to discuss a concept with a peer.

Formal Learning Groups

Formal learning groups are assigned a task or project and stay together until it is complete. There is a clear structure to these groups set by the teacher that includes task and behaviour expectations. Formal learning groups can be heterogeneous or homogeneous, depending on the assignment. Most groups perform well with three to four people, any more than five can become unproductive. Doing a project, solving a series of problems, reviewing for a test, or writing a report are all examples of how formal learning groups can be used in a classroom.

Cooperative Base Groups

These groups are different from the previous two in that they are long term support groups. Base groups should last for a minimum of a semester but can be anywhere up to several years. Since they are long term commitments, typically these groups become more than just academic problem solving groups. Members in base groups often become a personal support system for each other, building relationships and trust during the duration of their cooperative learning process. The goal of cooperative base groups is that the members develop peer accountability and support each other while learning together.

Conclusion

It is acceptable to use more than one type of group at a time! For example, you can assign a project using formal learning groups and still use informal groups during teaching time where the formal groups aren't working together. If you have a class where cooperating is a challenge, you may need many opportunities for your students to practice working together. Start out simple and work your way towards more formal cooperative learning situations.

5 Steps to Prepare for Cooperative Learning

Get Your Training Sessions Ready for Cooperative Learning

We've discussed the advantages and disadvantages to cooperative learning and different types of groups that you can form with students. Once you've decided to use small groups in your class, you need to make sure you are adequately prepared in order to be successful using this teaching method. When preparing, keep these five steps in mind:

1. Plan

Obviously you want to have goals and objectives for the academic task at hand, but there's another element of planning that needs to happen with cooperative learning. You also need to consider objectives for social skills, such as team work or peer accountability. Other things to think about include group size and composition. Think about how long your groups will be formed and how many students will make up each group. (See this post for more information on types of groups.) Will you have a group leader? Will all the work be evenly distributed? Plan for all of these elements beforehand. You also need to consider which types of assessment are most appropriate for the assignment and how the students will help with that aspect.

2. Introduce

Clearly communicating your goals and objectives to your students is vital. You will need to explain criteria for the academic task, as well as behavioural expectations for working with peers. Time limits, accountability, and decision making within the group all need to be discussed before the project even starts. It may be helpful to develop an assessment rubric and go over it with your students so they know exactly what to expect. Allow time for questions from your students to ensure that everything is clearly understood. This step is very important, for if your students do not know what is expected of them academically and behaviourally, their cooperative learning experience may not be successful.

3. Monitor

Once students have begun to work in their groups, it is your job to monitor and observe. You should be available to answer questions and provide clarification as needed but you should also be spending some amount of time in each group listening and monitoring. Observe how the students are working together and ask questions to stimulate thinking if necessary. Make notes about each group to assist you in the assessment step.

4. Assess

With cooperative learning, assessment can be tricky at times. You want to hold both individuals and the group accountable for the academic work and possibly even the social objectives. Using a mixture of self assessment, group assessment and your own judgement usually works well to determine a final grade.

5. Process

Allow time for your students to reflect upon their cooperative learning experience and give feedback on the academic assignment and the group structure. Hear what worked well and look for ways to improve upon next time.

Three Simple Cooperative Learning Activities You Should Try

This is our fourth and final post in a series on cooperative learning. Previously we've discussed what cooperative learning is, different types, and how to plan and prepare for it effectively. This last post outlines some examples of cooperative learning activities to be used in your training sessions.

> "While there is a place for long range assignments, it is also acceptable to use quick and easy activities to promote group learning"

Three Simple Cooperative Learning Activities

Often teachers can over think cooperative learning exercises and make them more complicated than necessary. While there is a place for long range assignments, it is also acceptable to use quick and easy activities to promote group learning. Not only are these effective, they are also great ways to fill an extra couple minutes or break up a long lecture.

1. Think-Pair-Share

- Purpose: Ensures maximum discussion within a group. Each student is held accountable.
- Objective: Students share thoughts, feelings and information on topic with each other and with the large group.
- Process: Instruct students to individually think about a question or prompt for a few minutes. Then with a partner, discuss the prompt and each person's opinions on the subject for a few more minutes. Finally, let each pair share with the large group their conclusions on the topic.

2. Student Lead Teaching

- Purpose: Enables mastery of specific parts of information with a focus on public speaking.
- Objective: Students research sections of information and teach to the group.
- Process: Each group of students are assigned a segment of information. They research, master and teach their information to

the group. This can be used as a short or long assignment.

3. Three Minute Reviews

- **Purpose:** Allows students to interact with previously taught material.
- **Objective:** Students turn to a neighbour and quickly discuss a question or review information.
- **Process:** Before an assessment or at the beginning of a class, pose a question to students to discuss briefly. After three minutes, call their attention back and get feedback from their discussion. This can be an icebreaker or a review before an assessment.

Conclusion

We hoped you enjoyed this series on cooperative learning! If you have any comments or questions, don't hesitate to get in touch!

Teach the Important

Your ultimate goal as a teacher is to cause your students to learn and to retain the facts that you have taught them. This can be challenging, so this is the first in a series on practical ways to help your students learn and retain what they have learned.

Teach the Important

The Pareto Principle, or Rule of 80/20, states that usually 80% of effects are a result of 20% of causes. This principle was originally suggested by an Italian economist, who noticed that the majority of the land in Italy was held by a small minority of the population. This principle still applies today on a global scale – 80% of the world's wealth is owned by 20% of the world's population, but there are many more applications that can be found in other areas of life.

In business, often 80% of a company's profits usually come from 20% of the products. It can also mean that 20% of your sales staff are making 80% of the sales and 80% of your complaints come from 20% of your customers. Most business owners would agree that identifying the 20% is key to running a successful business.

Identify the Vital Few & the Trivial Many

So how does this principle translate into training seminars or training sessions? As with a business, teachers need to know what the 20% is. There is an unlimited amount of information that you could be presenting to your students, but not all of it is relevant to their jobs or to your company. If we apply the Pareto Principle, 80% of the information that is taught is probably not relevant. As teachers, you need to discern which pieces of information are vital and which are trivial.

Communicate the 20% to Students

In an ideal setting, teachers would only teach the vital 20%. Being free to do away with the trivial or less important information would undoubtedly energise both teachers and students, especially if the students know that they are only being taught the most important facts! Unfortunately that may not always be realistic, especially when a specific curriculum is mandatory. However, the teacher can set the pacing of a course and decide to focus more or less on certain aspects. Identify which aspects carry the most benefits and prioritise those, both in time spent teaching and in emphasis. It is okay to let your students in on the “secret” of this principle! They should know which pieces of content are the most important to focus on. This will help your students perform well on assessments and in their jobs.

Benefits

Not only does focusing on the vital 20% maximise teaching time, it also ensures that your students are equipped with the knowledge they need most. Teachers can spend more time focusing on what is truly important which enables students to understand it more fully. Everybody wins!

Teach to Be Understood

Once you've determined what are the most important things to teach, you need to be sure to teach in a way that is easily understood. The decisions on what to teach in order to be best understood need to happen on the front end, when you're in the planning stages. It is important to:

> "While you are teaching, pay attention to body language and non-verbal cues"

Know Your Audience and Timeframe

Your focus could differ substantially given the make up of your audience. If you are presenting to managers, most likely your content will be different than if you are teaching hourly employees. The subject might be the same, but the "vital few" could vary depending on who is sitting in your class. Similarly, if you have one hour to present versus two days, your content will change drastically.

Know your Purpose

Think about what you want to accomplish. You could have very different purposes depending on your audience and timeframe. It's helpful to plan backwards- start at your desired outcome and then decide how to best reach those goals.

Once you have established your audience, timeframe and purpose, you should think about the level of understanding that you want your students to reach.

- **Surface** Awareness: "I've heard of that topic before and I know a little bit about it."
- **Average** Understanding: "I generally know how that concept works, but couldn't explain it well."
- **Thorough** Comprehension: "I am an expert on this topic and could teach it to others."

Remember, not all facts or concepts need to treated equally! Some items may only need to be understood at a surface level, while others should be thoroughly understood. You as the teacher need to be clear on which pieces of information fall into which level of understanding so you can allocate your time wisely. The higher level of understanding you wish your students to have, the more time you need to spend teaching those concepts.

You should also assess the levels differently. Surface awareness should be tested using multiple choice while average understanding can be tested using short answer or brief essays. The thorough comprehension level should be assessed in a discussion of the main components of a topic or a list of the complete facts.

An important piece of using the levels of understanding is clearly communicating them to your students. As with the Pareto Principle, your students should know which facts fall at which level. This enables them to focus their attention and their study efforts in the same way that you will be focusing your teaching.

Pay Attention to Body Language and Nonverbal Cues

While you are teaching, pay attention to body language and nonverbal cues. If your students are nodding off or whispering to a neighbour, they probably won't have a thorough level of understanding what you are teaching. If they are making eye contact and listening closely, you're doing a good job! If you can't discern through observing, then ask questions to assess on the spot whether or not they are tracking with you. Remember, it is your job to cause your students to learn, so if it appears that they aren't then you need to do something different in order to help them be successful!

Teach for Mastery

We've discussed teaching what is important and how to be understood by your students. Hearing and understanding the vital pieces of information you have shared with them is not enough though. Mastery must occur. Your students must be able to memorise, integrate and utilise what you have taught.

Memorise with Mnemonics

Many students claim that they dislike memorising, or that they aren't good at it. That is often true when students are inundated with facts that are not relevant or important. But since you have focused on the vital few and made sure that your students thoroughly comprehend, memorising will be much easier! Use mnemonic devices while you teach to help your students memorise while they are learning. Some effective mnemonic devices include: pictures, graphics and charts alliteration, rhyme and acrostics chants or songs tell a story

Using mnemonic devices is a great teaching strategy because it also helps your students learn according to their learning style! Involve your students in choosing devices that work best for them. Some students will remember a song better than an acrostic and vice versa. Give options and encourage your students to be creative in developing ways to remember facts.

Integrate

Integration happens when your students are able to take what you have taught them and apply it to other contexts. You want them to be so familiar with their new knowledge that they can intuitively apply it in many situations. Assessing students' ability to integrate is recommended, for if you realise that they cannot transfer knowledge to different contexts then you may need to reteach.

Utilise

The ultimate goal of education is independent utilisation. When you the teacher are not around, are your students utilising what you have taught them? Have they internalised the knowledge so thoroughly that they automatically apply it in a variety of situations? The answer should be yes! You should see this step play out in their daily work processes. Your goal is that what you have taught will have a long reaching impact on your students' lives!

Conclusion

Remember, you want your students to master the most important pieces of information. Teach what is important in a way that can be understood and mastered.

5 Simple Ways to Ensure Your Students are Learning

Have you ever been in a class or seminar where the students seemed uninterested in learning? How did the teacher or presenter behave? Did they simply keep going through the material or did they do everything they could to engage their students?

A Teacher's Primary Responsibility is to Cause Students to Learn

Unfortunately, many teachers believe that learning is largely the responsibility of the student. They approach teaching as a responsibility to cover content in a systematic way. However, that's not real teaching! A teacher's primary responsibility is to cause students to learn. If a student is not learning successfully then they are not being taught well.

5 Simple Ways to Ensure Your Students are Learning

So how do teachers cause students to learn? Here are some simple ways to ensure that your students are learning.

- **Be prepared.** Knowing your content is crucial. The better you know your material, the easier it is to be aware of your students and observe who is paying attention and who is not. If you're having to refer to your notes constantly then it becomes difficult to really engage your audience.
- **Be willing to adapt.** There will be times when your carefully planned lesson simply doesn't work. At that point, you need to be able to throw the plan out the window and try a new approach. Change teaching styles, take a break, or add in a new activity to switch things up. It's okay to differ from your original plan! As long as you are prepared and comfortable with your content, this should be fairly easy to do.
- **Engage your audience.** If you notice a student who is not paying attention, do something to engage him! Tell a personal story, make a joke, ask them a question. Chances are they might not be focused because you're not addressing their learning style, so throw in an element that will get his attention.
- **Reteach if necessary.** Too often teachers keep covering new content,

even if their students fail to master concepts. Your assessments (they can be formal or informal) should be guiding your instruction. If you realise that your students are not grasping the concepts you teach after assessing them, then reteach or clarify.

- **Reflect.** It is good practice to "grade" yourself after the end of each class or seminar. Think about what went well and how you can improve next time. Remember, your job as a teacher is to enable your students to learn. If your students are struggling, then you need to change what you are doing to ensure success.

Students that learn better will return for more education again and again. More investment in your students will pay huge dividends to your training business or internal training department, so make sure you don't skimp on this important responsibility!

Exploring The Socratic Method

The Socratic method is one of the best ways to help guide your students through critical thinking in a way that is challenging and engaging. Developed by the Greek philosopher Socrates, the Socratic method is based on questioning techniques that stimulate discussion and critical thinking. Instead of lecturing, the teacher guides student learning by asking questions that challenge their opinions.

Think back to your favourite teacher in school and try to remember why they were your favourite. Was it because they were a talented lecturer? Did they allow lots of discussion? Chances are you remember the teachers who taught you by inquiry, by leading you to knowledge through discovery. Most of us respond best to instruction where we play a part in our learning.

Take a look at the following characteristics and see which classroom seems like a better learning environment.

Traditional Classroom Lecture:

- Teacher instructs the majority of the time.
- The information that is shared by the teacher is assumed to be correct.
- Students listen, take notes, and occasionally ask or answer clarifying questions.

Socratic Method Classroom:

- The teacher asks questions to guide and direct the discussion.
- The teacher may play devil's advocate in order to stimulate thinking.
- Students actively answer and participate in discussion for the majority of class.
- Students articulate their own thoughts and opinions.

Traditional lecture style teaching has its place, especially in very large groups of people. However, for most job specific trainings it can be mundane and counterproductive. Instead of preparing presentations led by a teacher, think about your students and what they bring to the table. They have opinions and thoughts that are valuable and worth being shared! Using the Socratic method will not only liven up a training session, it will cause your students to actively engage and interact with the information presented.

4 Key Principles of the Socratic Method

There are four basic principles to keep in mind while planning a lesson using the Socratic method:

- Prepare open ended questions. Stay away from questions that have a yes/no answer. This will not generate discussion. Broad, open ended questions that will lead to exploration are the best kinds to have ready.
- Clearly state expectations at the beginning. Tell your students you want them to speak up and discuss, and that you won't be lecturing the whole time. This will help them to know the format of your training. You can also state some simple ground rules, such as the need to stay on topic and being respectful of others.
- You may not need to talk much once the discussion gets going! The role of the teacher is really more of a facilitator in this type of class. It will be necessary at times to guide the discussion back on track or remind students about the topic, but let the students talk as much as they want as long as it is productive. It may also be necessary to occasionally draw other students into the conversation by asking them what they think.
- Give Plenty of Time. It is natural to want to answer your own question after a couple seconds of awkward silence. Don't do it! Wait for up to a minute before rephrasing your question. This allows students time to think and also shows them that you are committed to having a discussion instead of lecturing.

Use these principles when planning your next training session. Most likely you'll be surprised at the level of participation that you get from your students!

A Practical Guide to Implementing the Socratic Method

Using the questioning model of the Socratic Method in your classroom is one of the best ways to challenge your students' critical thinking. However, this teaching technique does not always come naturally. It should be practiced and thought through carefully before leading a training session. You should be aware of the four different types of questions, and how to use them most effectively.

Four Important Types of Questions

Launching Questions

These are your open ended questions, the primer to get the discussion going. They are also used if the conversation lags. Ask your students:

- What do you think of this topic?
- What is your opinion on this subject?
- How do you think this problem should be solved? What would be another way of looking at this? What else? What then?

Hearing students' thoughts and opinions on the issue will not only begin the conversation, it will also validate their role as participants.

Clarifying Questions

Ask clarifying questions to continue the discussion and help the speaker dig deeper with what they are communicating. These also serve to guide the conversation back on track if necessary. Examples of these questions are:

- What did you mean by that?
- Would you explain that again?
- How does this relate to our topic?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses to this argument?
- Would you explain why this is necessary?
- What would be an example?

Summarising Questions

Asking your students to summarise their thoughts is key, especially if the discussion gets off on a tangent or if a person brings up important points that you would like repeated. Having a student summarise their thoughts in a concise way not only clarifies their viewpoints but it also helps the other listeners understand more fully. Summarising questions can be simple:

- Will you summarise that point?
- Say that part again please.
- What is your point?
- What I'm hearing you say is...

Application Questions

The application part of any class is the most crucial. Having a wonderful discussion without application is not productive. You must guide the conversation around to application because most likely it will not happen naturally. To do that, ask questions like:

- How can we apply this to our jobs?
- How does this affect how we work?
- Using what we have discussed, how do we improve this situation?
- Where do we go from here?
- Why do you think I asked you this question?
- What is next?

Conclusion

Remember, this teaching style does not always come naturally for everyone. It should be practiced and thought through before leading a discussion in this manner. Be prepared and take a thorough list of questions to refer to during your class.

The Best Way to Increase Course Bookings

We all know that course bookings are the lifeblood to any training organisation. Even if you're not selling your courses, you're going to be looking to drive as many students to book onto your course offerings as possible.

So what's the best way to increase course bookings?

Allow your students to register (and pay, if necessary) for your courses online.

What Separates the Best from the Rest?

Our experience gleaned from providing software to training providers all around the world has been informative when trying to discern why one business or operation performs better than another. In almost every case, those organisations that take online course bookings (even if the booking forms are internal or the courses are free) perform better than their offline counterparts.

Finding a Great Course Booking Platform

So what's the catch? The reality is that without training management software, easily providing accurate, up-to-date online registration for students can be a major technical and operational hurdle.

If you're considering implementing an online booking solution, make sure you consider the following:

- Easy Integration – Make sure it integrates with your current website or popular website platforms like WordPress. Advanced users may want to see if there's an Application Programming Interface (API) available.
- Payment Support – If collecting payment, make sure that popular payment processors are supported (this will vary by geographic region and country).
- Easy Invoicing – Once a booking is taken, make sure that invoicing and registration on the actual course is quick and easy.
- Automatic Updates to Course Listings – When you add a new course offering or schedule a new event, make sure that your booking platform automatically updates to avoid wasted time duplicating data entry (or even worse, requiring an IT person to help!)
- Reasonable Cost - free course registration software does exist, but sometimes these booking systems take a percentage of your booking as fees, or have other hidden costs. Most course registration applications that cost money will include support which can be invaluable when problems arise. When evaluating pricing,

we recommend dividing the costs across the number of bookings you normally take via the web, and seeing if that per course figure makes sense for your training business.

Conclusion

By following these four guidelines, you'll make sure you have a modern, easy to update, easy to use system that provides you with more students booked onto more courses!

8 Benefits of an Online Course Booking System

Are you thinking about implementing an online course booking system? If not, you should be. Our experience has shown there are clear and consistent benefits for training companies who provide an easy way to browse, select, and pay for courses online.

"Offering online course booking should mean that your website course listings are always up to date"

1. Easier for Customers

All other things being equal, most people prefer to book online. This is particularly true for prospects that find your courses via the internet. Most customers would rather choose their course, enter their details, and pay all in one transaction. If customers have questions, they may prefer to call, but booking and paying via a website is much quicker that dialling a number and waiting on hold.

2. Dynamically Update Your Website

Offering online course booking should mean that your website course listings are always up to date. Any decent system will provide a way for you to dynamically update your course listings on your website, preventing it from becoming stale. One thing to watch out for – if you've got another system that you use to manage your training, make sure you don't fall into the trap of having to enter your course listing in both systems – your website should be able to automatically pull the information from your training management system.

3. Run More Courses

We've found that training companies who choose to implement online course booking eventually end up running more courses, as they have much more time to research and provide new offerings. One of our customers doubled their profitability in under a year after revamping their website to let students book online.

4. Reduce Your Booking Costs

It's expensive to maintain phone lines, a call centre, raise invoices, and chase overdue payments. All of these things can be eliminated or reduced by having a well functioning website. You can reallocate your staff to doing more productive things when most of your students are registering online by themselves.

5. Receive Payment Up Front

When you accept online payments, you get the cash right away instead of having to send out a manual invoice and chase payment. It's also more convenient for your customers as they don't have one more thing to do prior to taking the class. Cash flow will be immediately improved after implementing an E-Commerce option on your website. Any decent course booking system will provide several options for online payment processing.

6. Never Lose a Lead

Have you ever had the phone ring but been unable to answer it? Or is your training admin getting out of control? Within online course booking, you'll never lose a lead or miss critical information. All the information is right there with the booking record.

7. Serve More Customers

Odds are you could probably serve double the number of customers who service today if most of the interactions you had prior to the course were automated. Look at your website as an extension of your staff, and offload work you're doing manually today, while providing better more modern services.

8. Offer E-Learning Courses

If you're interested in E-Learning, taking online bookings is an absolute requirement. If you've ever wanted to offer E-Learning education to your students but didn't know where to start, make sure you start with your website. It should be easy to add E-Learning courses to your normal training sessions once you've got your website up and accepting orders.

More Resources

- The Best Way to Increase Course Bookings
- Website Integrations from Administrate – Comparing our Course Booking Options.
- Online Course Booking Checklist for Training Providers
- Administrate Website Integrations

Online Course Booking Checklist

Training Providers – are you offering online course registration? Even internal training departments can benefit from offering an online course booking capability from a website (even if it's internal). In our previous blog post we talked about how offering online course registration is the best way to increase student attendance. In this post, we provide a checklist of items you'll need to consider.

Categorise Your Courses

Visitors need to be able to quickly find your courses without scrolling through large lists. Make sure your courses are logically grouped into categories and subcategories (as appropriate) that will make sense to your visitors. Many training providers will offer different certifications within a broader theme – you might want to think about making these themes your categories.

Clearly organised course categories make a huge difference to visitors who are in a hurry.

Don't go overboard though! It's best to not have a category unless you have at least two courses that will live inside it, otherwise you'll make things more confusing to your visitors.

Make Sure Course Listings are Current

Once you have your courses categorised into easy to read (but not excessive) categories, make sure visitors can within a click or two at most see your upcoming courses. It's absolutely critical to keep this list up-to-date! Nothing drives visitors away faster than an out of date course list with dates and times that happened last week.

Don't Forget This Critical Course Information!

Your visitors won't be spending lots of time on your site. One research group estimates that most visitors will leave in under 20 seconds! However, compelling information can keep visitors interested and engaged for quite a bit longer. Our goal should be to leave as little doubt in the mind of your visitor as possible when looking at your course offerings.

Make sure you don't forget:

- Course Overview – general and background information on the course.
- Course Summary – key facts about the course including how long it will take, any certifications that will be awarded, delivery method, and typical class size.
- Topics Covered – a more detailed breakdown of the topics and sessions covered in the course, which supports the Course Overview.
- Why You're Different – Visitors are often shopping several training providers at once (they probably have multiple websites open at the same time for comparison). It's critical to differentiate yourself in respect to the competition.
- List of Upcoming Courses – this list should be easy to sort, include location information, dates, times, prices, and the option to book on right then and there. If you have limited places available, a great tip is to show how many places are left, thus creating a sense of urgency if there's just a couple places left!

Course Pages Must be SEO Friendly

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is an important component for any website. Websites that rank in the top ten results massively outperform lower ranking websites. You'll want to make sure that your course titles are presented to search engines in a "human readable" format which will help you rank better for web searches.

For example, all other things being equal, a course page with the URL (link) of http://www.yourcompany.com/IFRS-Training-Fundamentals will perform better than http://www.yourcompany.com/course.html?id=132.

Even more important – the URL you use to take bookings needs to be the same URL as your main website. For example, if your main website is "yourcompany.com" don't list your courses or registration forms at "somebookingtool.com"! Google and other search engines will assume that these pages are part of "somebookingtool.com" and won't give you any credit when calculating rankings. This is even true if your company name is used as a subdomain such as "yourcompany.somebookingtool.com".

Many course booking tools and programs will ignore the above and impact your rankings. Don't sacrifice this important business advantage!

Accept Online Payments

If you can't accept online payments from prospective students or clients you are at a serious disadvantage. People don't have the time to call (or worse, fax) in payment, and the best time to collect money is at the point of sale. Even if you're using a booking form on your website, you'll still need to accept payment as a second step which is time consuming for you and your client. Our experience with hundreds of training providers shows without a doubt that those who accept online course payments outperform those which don't every time!

Can You Do All the Above With No Additional Effort or Time?

If the answer is no, it's time to consider training administration software that is built to help you manage your course, and get them online without additional work.

For example, Administrate's WordPress plugin takes seconds to install, some simple configuration, and provides all of the above features for you so that you don't have to spend any additional time or effort managing your website's course listings!

When you add a course, it will appear on your website. When you receive a booking, the delegate information will appear within Administrate, complete with payment already processed and the invoice already sent!

Confused? More Information Available Here!

These online booking options seamlessly handle all of the items above, and are constantly being improved and updated to incorporate new features. Take the hassle out of running your website, and instead focus on delivering your training!

Make Sure You're Running a Cockroach Company

Ok, maybe not the best tagline for your business, but let's explore what we actually mean. Cockroaches are some of the most terrifying insects, at least in our opinion. Who hasn't had a terrifying experience turning on the lights and seeing them scatter away? While cockroaches may be disturbing, they do have some amazing characteristics that you can apply to your training business, and that's what we're interested in.

Cockroaches – The Ultimate Survivalists

Simply put, cockroaches are some of the hardiest insects on our planet. According to Wikipedia, some cockroaches can:

- Survive for a month without food, or even longer with very little food such as the glue from the back of a postage stamp!
- Go without air for up to 45 minutes!
- Survive being submerged under water for up to 30 minutes!
- Withstand 6 to 15 times the radiation dosages humans can!

Because of this, it's often popularly suggested that cockroaches will "inherit the earth"!

Running a Cockroach Company

The training industry has had to weather the worldwide economic difficulties over the last few years. We're sad to say we've seen many training companies fold in that timespan. We've also seen many training companies succeed, despite the difficult economic climate.

What sets the two groups apart? We believe the difference is in how they approach their business. The ones who succeed are "Cockroach Companies", impossible to kill, and able to survive incredible circumstances.

Characteristics of Cockroach Companies

- Great at Finding Food (Marketing and Selling Courses) – do you have a well oiled marketing and sales machine? This doesn't necessarily mean you have tonnes of people working to market our sell your courses, but it does mean you spend time on this every day. Your marketing messages should be well defined and communicated, your sales process should be bullet proof, and you should be offering online bookings for your courses. Most training companies fail because they can't get enough people registered on their courses.

- Great at Finding Shelter (Tools, Backups, Technology) – your business needs a safe place to operate from, and quality tools to brave the elements. Do you have everything backed up electronically? Does your training administration software get maintained regularly, without fail? Do you have training administration software to help keep track of everything? We've had several clients of ours tell us how using Administrate to run their business meant they could get rid of their office and have their employees work from home, thus helping them make it through tougher times.

- Bred For Survival (Frugal, Close Attention to Finances) – Cockroach companies seem to be born with survival in their DNA, just like how the cell structure of a cockroach makes it less susceptible to radiation damage. Breed a culture of frugality within your workforce, don't allow waste, and explain how these habits will make the bad times bearable and the good times twice as great. Make sure you can quickly invoice and track your debtors, and if possible take payment for your courses when they book online!

- Able to Move Fast (Changes are Made Efficiently and For the Right Reasons) – when we release a new feature or change to Administrate, we often see the cockroach companies lining up to learn about the changes and they're usually the first to implement them. This is because they've taken care of their normal operations, are using their training management system to the fullest, and can therefore now move fast to get ahead of the competition.

- Avoiding Traps (Focusing on What's Important) – The smartest cockroaches know a trap when they see it, and avoid them, no matter how tempting. Cockroach companies tend to avoid taking on projects they don't have experience in, signing longterm contracts for unproven tools (why not take a free trial first?), or always going with the quick fix when a more fundamental change may be needed. Avoiding these traps can really make a difference!

- Seeking Out New Areas (More Courses? E-Learning?) – We've seen many training companies do well in their initial area, then branch out to offering different courses or using different distribution models to get extra sources of income in case one source falters. It doesn't take very much time or investment to explore re-purposing some of your offline courses and offering an E-Learning version, particularly if you use Administrate, so why not give it a go?

Our Mission is to Support Training Companies

We help training companies all over the world every day, and we love it! Our training administration software is designed to give you the necessary tools to turn your training operation into a Cockroach Company! We'll support you on every step of the training delivery process:

- Marketing
- Sales and Online Course Booking
- Course administration, resource allocation, and scheduling
- Keeping up with the finances and billing
- Providing a fantastic E-Learning platform for your online courses

Don't hesitate to get in touch!

5 Website Mistakes to Avoid

Administrate helps training companies and training departments manage their "backend" operations, but this doesn't mean we're a stranger to training company websites. Most commercial training operations have a web presence and even training departments maintain some type of Intranet presence (if not a publicly facing website of their own). Here are some mistakes to avoid when planning a new website or reviewing your existing web properties. »

Mistake #1: A Website that's Hard to Update

This is the most critical mistake you can make with your website, as it'll mean you never update it. A quick litmus test is if you can't make a text change or put up a news posting in under a few minutes from start to finish, your website is not up to snuff. Five years ago needing to call a designer or technical resource may have been somewhat normal, but today there's no excuse. Online content management and blogging tools like the insanely popular WordPress platform provide a modern, constantly updated foundation for your website that anyone can manage.

Mistake #2: Course Listings or Schedules that Don't Update Automatically

If you make a change to a course schedule or event within your training administration system, does your website automatically update to reflect this? If not, you're in for quite a bit of manual work that may or may not get done, leading to confusion. Many commercial training providers are constantly updating their event offerings in response to market demand, instructor availability, or venue availability, and this kind of churn can mean a lot of time lost in activities that aren't productive. Many training administration software platforms (Administrate being one of them) provide ways to link your website to your back office so you don't have to worry about these kinds of tedious (yet important) tasks.

Mistake #3: No Option for Online Course Booking

Can your customers visit your website, see your course offerings, check times and locations, and then book onto a course? If not you're missing a potentially huge market. It's also adding another friction point to your sales process as now customers need to either send you an email or pick up the phone. Things as simple as life getting in the way – a doorbell or some other distraction – can be the difference between them booking onto your course or forgetting and going with a competitor. Even the best, most effective, frictionless websites only convert 1-3% of their traffic to sales – why make things more difficult?

Most training management platforms will provide an online booking option. Things to look for:

- Tight integration with your back-end operational systems.
- Payment provider / processor integration.
- Easy to integrate into existing websites.

Mistake #4: No Recent Website Updates

You wouldn't leave the lights off and doors locked to a training venue when you're expecting students to arrive for an event, but this is exactly the message you send to prospective customers if you don't regularly update your website.

Updating your website regularly has several advantages:

- It signals to (human) visitors that you're engaged.
- It signals to search engines (non-humans) that your website is active which will influence search engine rankings.
- Each piece of quality content you add will earn you credibility with your audience, particularly when compared to a competitor's stale website.

Mistake #5: Not Responding to Requests via Your Root Domain

It's amazing how often this happens. Our website address is www.GetAdministrate.com which means our root domain is "GetAdministrate.com". Make sure your website works on both addresses, which should both be valid. We often see beautiful websites that have great content, are regularly updated, and accept online bookings not work when typing in just their root domain. Get your web host to fix this for you if it's not working on your site.

Maintaining a website is an ongoing task, just like the rest of your training operation. Don't forget to invest in it regularly!

What Do Training Providers and Tour de France Cyclists Have in Common?

The 100th Tour de France is upon us! Here in Britain cycling has increased massively in popularity since Sir Bradley Wiggins became the first British cyclist to with the Tour last year, and all eyes are upon current front-runner Chris Froome and Team Sky. The Tour de France is one of the most watched sporting events in the world, and is thought by many to be the most difficult competition in sports.

What does all of this have to do with providing training? More than you'd think!

Your Equipment is Really Important

There probably aren't many sporting events as closely tied to technology as professional cycling. Your bike, clothing, equipment, tools, and maintenance program massively impact your ability to even begin competing in an event like the Tour de France. Even the best rider who is forced to ride substandard equipment will struggle over long distances against riders he can normally best. Check out Gizmodo's great article on how cycling technology has evolved over the years!

Your equipment is a huge factor when delivering training as well, but instead of using bikes, you'll need a toolset that can help you manage the complex and time sensitive nature of training delivery. Providing quality training courses requires lots of attention to detail, involves many complex sequences of tasks, and can overwhelm even the best operation if the tools are sub par. Users of Administrate love how everything is kept online in a single system. Now they can better manage their training operation with less time investment than before!

Amateur riders often don professional jerseys and buy equipment that makes them look like pros out on the road. In the same way, training providers who are just starting can often position their offerings against much larger companies with more resources just buy leveraging the features and online options Administrate provides!

Preparation Matters

Getting ready for one of the Grand Tours is a multi-year long affair, beginning long before the first stage. Preparation takes many forms, and isn't always just physical – top teams invest in mental preparation, education on riding form, and technical advances in addition to proper nutrition and care of athlete's bodies.

Preparing in advance of your courses is instrumental to your success as a training provider too! In order to deliver quality education, you need to make sure your instructors, schedules, customers, finances, course content, post-class evaluations, booking options, and marketing are all taken care of.

Why not check out some of the resources we've compiled to help you prepare?

- 6 Ways to Show Your Students You Care
- Online Course Booking Checklist
- Boost Retention of Your Training Courses with this Simple Technique
- Lots more Training Tips here! Subscribe to our newsletter to make sure you don't miss one!

It's a Marathon, Not a Sprint

The Tour de France is a twenty-three day long race run in multiple stages over at least two thousand miles (3,200km). It's often said that the Tour is won "in bed" rather than out on the road, as physical recovery between stages is critical to winning the race. Riders who race well one day may not be as strong the next, and this can obliterate their chances for winning.

Running a training organisation is likewise a marathon activity, and the key is to deliver consistently quality results on every interaction with your students. Training companies or departments who don't pay attention to their daily operations will fail over the long term.

One of the best ways to ensure consistent, standardised delivery of training over time is to use a training management system to manage workflows and processes. Administrate customers love how they can define course workflows that make sure that joining instructions are sent prior to a class, or remind staff to book lunch for a venue a week in advance. Details like this can make all the difference in the longterm viability of training providers.

This is a Team Sport

Although won by an individual, the Tour de France is certainly a team sport. Nobody can win the Tour alone. Riders work with teammates out in the peloton, but they're also backed up by coaches, drivers, cooks, soigneurs, mechanics, doctors, therapists, and financial sponsors. Out on the road, riders from the same team work together to shelter the leader from the wind, wrecks, debris, and supply him with enough food and liquids to be in a position to win the stage.

Delivering quality education isn't a solo outing either – training companies and internal training departments rely on content providers, instructors, training managers, salesmen, and marketers. Sometimes you'll see individuals wearing multiple hats to deliver training, but that's OK! Think of Administrate and our training management systems as just another member of your team working hard to make you successful.

Conclusion

Enjoy the Tour de France, and if you'd like to see how you could better enjoy the delivery of your training, don't hesitate to get in touch! Every day we live and breathe the delivery of training as we support hundreds of users all around the world!

10 Hallmarks of a Successful Software Implementation

Research indicates that software projects are truly the stuff of nightmares: "The odds of a large project finishing on time are close to zero. The odds of a large project being cancelled are an even-money bet."*

Don't become a statistic! By following these 10 simple steps you can make sure that any software implementation in your business is a success.

1. Appoint a Project Manager

You don't need someone with special training as an IT Project Manager, just someone who can be involved in the planning of what needs to be done, review timescales, and keep on top of tasks on a daily basis.

2. Get Familiar with Your New System

Make sure you spend most of your time identifying common workflows the system you're implementing will assist with or solve. These workflows will represent the crucial aspects of the system that are non-negotiable, and will quickly hone your attention to the things that truly matter. Even complex companies and organisations decompose to a handful of relatively simple processes, so make sure you pay attention to these workflows first and foremost.

If you can, prior to purchase, spend time on a demonstration instance of the software and satisfy yourself that the key jobs you require the software to perform actually work. Depending on your company's size, you may want to ensure a minimum of two people know the system well enough to deal with the inevitable questions that will crop up.

3. Set a (Realistic) Plan

Remember, if you fail to plan, you plan to fail! We suggest coming up with a first draft of a plan based on input from your vendor and internal discussions. Similarly, come up with a list of things that could derail the project, or impact timelines. These could be as simple as "John is on vacation during week 3 or more complex issues driven by factors such as needing a particular training session.

4. Break the Plan Down

Once you have a realistic plan, break the items on the plan down into weeks. If you'd like, you can use special project management software, but most projects don't need huge sophistication. For example, here's how we'd recommend implementing Administrate when converting from a previous training administration system:

- Week 1: Get up to speed with the software by learning the major workflows your staff will be using and exploring what's available during your free trial period.
- Week 2: Wipe the slate clean and start configuring it to meet your business requirements.
- Week 3: Introduce the new software to the rest of your company (give them a teaser of what's to come now that you can field any questions they're going to ask). It's also usually helpful to explain why the decision was made, and what other products were considered.
- Week 4: Train users on how to use the system. Break training sessions down into workflow based sessions, and make you follow the "Show it now do it" method of instruction.
- Week 5: Final tests by yourself and your team.
- Week 6: Roll-out the new system and run it parallel with your existing one (only allow staff to access the previous system for historical data, but strongly discourage this).
- Week 8: Switch off your old system and continue using your new software!

5. Communicate: Keep Your Plan Updated

As you proceed through your plan, make sure that you adjust expectations to match reality. When things don't go according to plan, make sure you communicate this quickly and clearly. This will avoid surprises and allow you to identify issues quickly, making sure you can correct them or reset expectations.

6. Win Over Your Staff

Make sure everyone knows and appreciates why the new system is coming. Have a few sessions in which you explain what's wrong with the current system or methodology, and make sure the new system has a solution for every frustration. For example, a training provider with loads of spreadsheets will want to eliminate duplicate effort by having everything in one place. By illustrating how laborious and labour intensive some of the existing processes are, you'll have a reference point once the new system is in place to compare.

7. Train Well

If necessary, get your users specific or custom training from your supplier (software vendor). Ensuring your new users know how to use the system is absolutely critical and could make or break your implementation. If your supplier offers a teach-yourself method, great! If they do but you're not sure whether it's enough, consider buying or asking for more help.

8. Roll-out When Ready

Keep to your plan as best you can, but make sure you only roll-out when you're ready. Nothing is worse than a rushed implementation!

9. Keep an Open Mind

You may find that you have to modify or change your existing processes to fit your new software. Try to keep an open mind and see where you might be able to improve existing processes to match your new software. Not all change is good, but often thing become ingrained through force of habit, and it's useful to take a step back and see where you can improve your existing workflows.

10. Stay Connected with Your Software Vendor

Lots of cloud based software services receive periodic updates that add new features or fix existing issues. Many times these new features are free! Other times, you may want to upgrade your existing plan to take advantage of new features.

To make sure you stay connected with your software vendor:

- Subscribe to their mailing list (Hint: ours in on the right!)
- Follow them on Twitter (particularly if there's an operational Twitter feed)
- Know how to find the release notes when changes occur.
- Schedule refresher training every 6-12 months to cover anything you may have missed.

Enjoy!

Implementations can be stressful and a lot of work, but they can also be fun and a time for learning new things and making your life easier. If you'd like to know how Administrate has helped hundreds of training companies around the world, make sure you get in touch with us today!

* from Rapid Development, by Steve McConnell

5 Ways to Build an Awesome Mailing List (that Performs!)

Get the Right Tools

Mailing lists are like any other business process – you need the right tools to build them and maintain them. Make sure you have the following:

- Customer Relationship Management (CRM) or some kind of contacts database that will let you report on and filter your data. Use this tool to maintain your mailing list and add new students as they attend your courses.

- Email Service Provider (ESP) that will handle the sending, help you craft beautiful emails with themes and other email design capabilities, and track opens and clicks once the email is sent. Note that Email Service Providers will also help keep you compliant with unsubscribe requirements and prevent you from accidentally emailing customers who have asked to be removed from your list.

Clearly Define Your List's Purpose

Every mailing list needs a reason for existing. It's how you'll attract new members, retain existing subscribers, and it'll drive the content you share with the list. This is a very important step, and even if the ultimate reason for your list is to act as a sales tool, there are huge benefits to focusing your list on something other than just selling. With rare exceptions (daily deal lists for example) most people don't want to sign up just to be constantly sold. Training providers can often provide huge ongoing value from their mailing lists by delivering commentary, news, and other information related to the courses they offer. When done right, a mailing list with a purpose can add value to your course offerings and differentiate you from the competition!

Know Your Audience

Now that your mailing list has a purpose, make sure you understand who you're communicating to. For training providers communicating around their course offerings, your audience will often be the same type of people that walk through your door every day and attend your classes. It's important to not lose sight of this when crafting your emails – make sure you're hitting topics that are relevant and use appropriate design, language, and references when communicating. If your classroom tone is informal, your emails should be as well. If you pride yourself on a highly professional, buttoned down environment, your emails should ooze professionalism in their design and wording.

Provide Value

This is the most important part of running a great mailing list – make sure you're providing value to your audience! Don't make your content an afterthought supporting your sales message, make sure that what you're saying is valuable irrespective of any kind of product or service you happen to provide. People know when you're only going through the motions or are just looking to make a sale.

Here are some great ways training providers can brainstorm valuable content:

- Write down the top 15 questions prospective students have when considering your courses. The answers and context around these questions will be extremely valuable to others.

- Think about the top 5 challenges the industry you provide training for faces. Now research them and share the challenges and some solutions. You may even find out a great new course offering lurking there!

- Consider the top 5 objections prospective students may have to entering your industry, signing up for a course, or furthering their education.

Just by running through these three brainstorming exercises, you'll come up with 25 topics to share with your newsletter. At one mailing a week, that's half a year's content! Bolster these topics with other snippets here are there and you'll be providing high value content in no time.

Make sure that you monitor each campaign's effectiveness on opens and clicks to monitor how valuable your members are finding your list. Adjust your topics and see how your members respond. The tools we mentioned above will take care of this for you.

Remember – the more value you provide, the more your members will engage with your mailing, and the better your list will perform from a sales perspective.

Make it Easy to Sign Up

It should be super simple to signup for your mailing list, and you should give ample opportunity at every turn. We'd recommend including a link to your mailing list signup within your email signature, feature it prominently on your website, and regularly mention it via social media outlets like Twitter, LinkedIn, or Facebook. Signing up should just require an email address for starters, and remember to make it easy to unsubscribe too in the event your members want to halt your mailings.

A Mailing List that Performs

Building a well performing mailing list isn't that hard, it just takes attention to detail and a commitment to providing great value to your audience. By following a "value first" strategy to engaging your list members, your conversion rates will ultimately be higher and provide lasting value for you and your customers. Now get out there and build your lists!