Brown Bagger

This section is set up to provide a ready-made Brown Bag Session for you to use with employees and/or managers. Use as is, or adapt this information for a general employee group. You may reproduce as many copies as needed.

Train the Trainer, before Training Others
Presentation Tips for Busy Professionals

One of the biggest misconceptions in the business world is that if you are an expert on a certain topic, then you can be a trainer. However, understanding a topic does not necessarily translate into knowing how to help others learn the subject matter as well as you. In truth, the secret to successful training is to train the trainers FIRST...before they train others.

There is an entire skill set that needs to belong to a person conducting a given training, which includes knowing adults' learning styles, and the best ways to build this bridge — from knowing to doing. We call these adult learning principles. They are the keys that will open both the door to success if applied correctly...and the door to failure if they are ignored. (**Editor's note**: See the accompanying article, "Adult Learning Principles" on page 3.)

The people that design training programs must also understand these principles. The good news is that these skills can be taught and learned *if* they are included in the plans of a training department. If they're not, the results of all trainings are left to the roll of a dice.

Background

Many of us who work in training and professional development began our careers coming straight from "line" functions in an organization, and were tapped to facilitate trainings because we were good at our jobs.

When I needed to hire staff, in addition to hiring for knowledge of subject matter, I looked at something I called *heart*. I knew that I could teach someone how to train another person, but I also wanted to see if they had the desire to share what they knew with another person.

Finding people with the right heart means that they see the value in more people knowing what they know. As a result, they are willing to share. In fact, the only caveat I've discovered that prevents an expert from becoming a great trainer is a lack of a heart or willingness to share.

Did You Learn?... Or Were You Bored?

Think back to a recent training session you attended, and ask yourself if you were "engaged." Did the activities make you interact with the subject being taught? Or, did you find yourself listening half-heartedly while multi-tasking on other things at the same time?

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Moreover, after the event, were you able to implement the new skills rather quickly? Or, did the new skills dissipate rather quickly? Did the training materials used in training add to your learning process before, during or after the event, or are you asking yourself right now, what training materials?

If the answers to these questions are positive, then the people involved in your trainings are skilled in not only the subject matter, but in the modes of adult learning. This is outstanding news, and you should be most pleased with your organization's training efforts.

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However, if your answers are not positive, then the training department is dysfunctional. Unfortunately, this is all too common. When I discover training materials that are simply a bunch of handouts — or worse yet, a 4-inch thick manual, I know that instructional design skills are lacking.

Too often, I see a lack of learning as the result. In addition, when any of these poor practices are in place there is usually a manager running the training function who doesn't understand anything about adult learning principles.

Before you spend too much time worrying about the color of the next binder that holds your training program materials, take the time to make sure that the *contents* will add value to the learning process.

Before an "all-star" employee is selected to lead a training session, webinar, etc., remember that they need to have the skills to facilitate an engaging event FIRST. Taking the time to train trainers before letting them train others will not only yield better results, but it will make the learning experience for everyone a lot more enjoyable!

Presentations that Require You to THINK

Many speakers are accomplished professionals who know their stuff, but they don't know how to convey it. The audience is eager, open and wants the speaker to succeed. Our corporate culture, however, has intimidated audiences into being polite and placid. Presenting technical, complicated material need not be a chore when you T.H.I.N.K.!

Transform how you think about your role

Your first job is to be a memory-maker, so don't be the supplier of solely facts and data. You are there to present and inform, but more importantly, you are there to create a learning environment. A community of learners is there to unite around your message and learn something from it. Presentations should focus on digesting content into directly applicable skills. Because any subject can be presented with interest and enthusiasm, you can transform your mindset from that of a lecturer to a role more like a preacher, counselor or facilitator.

Hunt for the essence of your content

When you simplify, you stand a greater chance of being a supreme educator. While coaching a sales representative from a Fortune 500 company, a consultant was told the rep feared that "dumbing things down" for his audience would reduce his credibility. The consultant encouraged the rep to speak with elegant simplicity, as that would engage customers into thinking of the meeting as a conversation. This allowed the sales rep to directly respond to the client's most pressing questions. Imagine the difference that this rep saw when he began the conversation by sharing four quotes from consumers who had used the product, and explained the results they had experienced. Outcomes, after all, are the essence of why anyone tries new products or services.

Investigate the expertise present among your audience

Facilitation does not mean "boring group work" because — when done effectively — it permits the attendees to meet and learn from one another. When you're given a timeframe in which to present, perhaps one hour, plan to speak for only one-third to half of the time. This allows for true interaction.

Net results make you valuable

Always ask yourself this question, "What do I want my audience to think, feel, and do as a result of this presentation?" It may help to send an advance email to the participants at your next meeting, asking the group about their work, their current challenges, and what they hope to learn during your time with them. This will give you a clear sense of direction that meets the audience where they are psychologically, and where they want to be professionally. Net results are what your boss and clients care about.

Know the stories and examples that make your presentation memorable

Watch the presenters at your next meeting just minutes before they start. Too many of them are likely fiddling with their slides. There comes a time, however, when professional presenters will stow away their slides and note

what *stories* and *examples* they will use to accompany each visual. This change in focus will have a dramatic change on how the audience perceives the speaker. When you personalize the content with real-life stories, your audience sees you as a peer – not as a lecturer. While PowerPoint can be a great tool for visually representing data, some speakers rely too heavily on it. To force yourself to re-focus your attention on your message, use a flip chart for your next presentation. As you draw and write you will focus on what the audience needs to know.

Remember, some of the most intimate connections with the audience can be made with no visual aid. Your audience will remember the stories; they'll forget about the slides. ∎

Sources: Kevin E. O'Connor, CSP, facilitator, medical educator, and author of "Fearless Facilitation." For more information, visit www.kevinoc.com; and Jim Hopkins, president/CEO of JK Hopkins Consulting and author of "The Training Physical." To find out more, check out www.jkhopkinsconsulting.com.

Adult Learning Principles

❖ Adults are *autonomous* and *self-directed*. They need to be free to direct themselves. Trainers must actively involve adult participants in the learning process and serve as facilitators. Specifically, they must get participants' perspectives about what topics to cover and let them work on projects that reflect their interests. They should allow the participants to assume responsibility for presentations and group leadership. They have to be sure to act as facilitators, guiding participants to their own knowledge rather than supplying them with facts. Finally, they must show participants how the class will help them reach their goals (e.g., via a personal goals sheet).

❖ Adults have accumulated a wealth of *life experiences* and *knowledge* that may include work-related activities, family responsibilities, and previous education. They need to connect learning to this knowledge/experience base. To help them do so, trainers should draw out participants' experience and knowledge that is relevant to the topic. They must relate theories and concepts to the participants and recognize the value of experience in learning.

❖ Adults are *goal-oriented*. Upon enrolling in a course, they usually know what goal they want to attain. Therefore, they appreciate an educational program that is organized and has clearly defined elements. Trainers must show participants how this class will help them
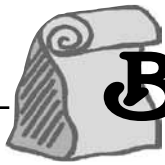
attain their goals. This classification of goals and course objectives must be done early in the course, workshop, etc.

❖ Adults are *relevancy-oriented*. They must see a reason for learning something. Learning has to be applicable to their work or other responsibilities to be of value to them. As a result, trainers must identify objectives for adult participants before the course begins. This also means that theories and concepts must be related to a setting familiar to participants. Letting participants choose projects that reflect their own interests can fulfill this need.

❖ Adults are *practical*, focusing on the aspects of a lesson most useful to them in their work. They may not be interested in knowledge for its own sake. Trainers must tell participants explicitly how the lesson will be useful to them on the job.

❖ As do all learners, adults need to be shown *respect*. Trainers must acknowledge the wealth of experiences that adult participants bring to a class, workshop, etc. These adults should be treated as equals in experience and knowledge and allowed to voice their opinions freely in class. ∎

Sources: Malcolm Knowles; and Stephen Lieb, Arizona Department of Health Services, South Mountain Community College.

Recommendations for Improving Speaking Skills

You've read the main *Brown Bagger* article and sidebar on "adult learning principles" and better understand how to make presentations more interesting. Perhaps the tips will help YOUR trainings as a busy EA professional. Or, maybe you've gained some solid ideas for employees of corporate clients who are looking to improve *their* speaking skills.

Either way, can these skills be practiced before they're needed on the job? Yes they can, according to Walt Grassl, author of "Stand Up and Speak Up," (http://waltgrassl.com). Walt says that joining a speaking club is a good idea. The following are among his recommendations:

❖ **Speak often** – Many new club members won't speak until they feel their speech is perfect, so, they only speak when pressured. They may feel they will forget part of their speech, which they might, but they have to speak in order to find out or to learn to overcome that problem. Not speaking does not help them improve. Club members are there to learn. The more often you speak, the faster you learn.

❖ **Listen to evaluations** – Feedback is one of the most valuable parts of the speaking club experience. Don't be offended by the comments. Listen with an open mind. Instead of thinking that you did something wrong, embrace the evaluation and focus on improving the next time you speak. If you are given multiple things to correct, don't try to fix everything at once. Remember the story of the tortoise and the hare. Slow, steady and continuous improvement wins the race.

❖ **Compete in contests** – Most speaking clubs hold speech contests. Compete in every one. Whether the type of speech plays to your strengths or not, enter the contest and do the best you can. The purpose is not to win the contest, but to give your best speech to date. You will practice a contest speech more than a weekly one, because the stakes are higher. If you do this repeatedly, you will see yourself advancing further and further each contest cycle, increasing your confidence and getting the opportunity to speak before progressively larger audiences.

❖ **Speak at other clubs** – Your community may have more than one speaking club that you can join. Or, if you travel to an area that has a club, ask if you can speak as a guest speaker. Many clubs welcome outside speakers. It gives their members a chance to hear fresh speakers, and it gives you the opportunity to speak in front of new faces. It's a win-win.

❖ **Record yourself** – When you hear or, better yet, see yourself, you experience what your audience does. An inexpensive digital camera is sufficient. However, if video is not an option, an audio recording is the next best thing. After several months, compare recordings. Seeing your progress will help motivate you to continue. ∎