

Characteristics and Competencies of an Effective Trainer

By Stephen J. Bavolek, Ph.D.

The title of this chapter speaks volumes to the challenges that you face on your quest to become an effective trainer. Conducting a quality training experience is not an easy task and is not recommended for those who take evaluative comments as personal criticism. The challenges are many, but so are the positive payoffs – if you are not afraid of going after them. The positive payoffs of conducting a training experience don't just automatically come to anyone. You have to work hard to achieve them, have a strong conviction that you can be a superb instructor, and a relentless determination to pursue that goal. Anything else and you will fall into the wasteland of ho-hum instructors who bore people to death and give learning a bad name. The moment we step into the role of trainer, we have an ethical responsibility to be the stimulus for the growth and development of those who are in our audience. So if you're ready to be a truly great "learning stimulus, let's get going.

What's in a Title?

A lot. A title connotes what the experience will be all about. It also connotes your style and what the possible outcomes will be. Let's examine the terms more closely.

First, some self-assessment. Look at each of the following terms in the box at the top of the next column and select the pair that best describes you and your audience.

	Yes	No
Are you a Trainer ?		
Is your audience Trainees?	_____	_____
Are you an Instructor ?		
Is your audience Instructees?	_____	_____
Are you an Educator ?		
Is your audience Learners?	_____	_____
Are you a Facilitator ?		
Is your audience Discoverers?	_____	_____
Are you a Teacher ?		
Is your audience Students?	_____	_____
Are you a Leader ?		
Is your audience Followers?	_____	_____
Are you a Presenter ?		
Is your audience Participants?	_____	_____

What did you choose? It wasn't that easy, was it? At times, your role can vary and be any one of these titles. It depends on what your goal is and what your agenda is. Now, let's examine the terms.

Trainer / Trainees

Sounds pretty sterile, doesn't it? The term is usually used to describe learning situations with animals. You know, elephant trainer, horse trainer, dog trainer. The term doesn't instill confidence in your trainee's ability to fully comprehend and integrate the learning that's taking place on some meaningful level. But training is important when you want to teach the techniques or mechanics of some skill, like massaging an infant. Training answers the question, "How"? Techniques are the means to the end and training is the best way to accomplish that goal. But infant massage is much more than training; knowing which stroke to use, when to use them, the direction and pressure of the stroke are all critical in helping parents incorporate massage into their parenting practices.

Instructor / Instructed

This is a weird dyad. People don't generally go around calling themselves instructees! An instructor gives instructions and seems to be like a trainer. Maybe an instructor is a trainer of people. You know, cooking instructor, music instructor, massage instructor, etc. When you instruct someone, it generally means you're telling them what to do. This works in some learning situations – but not in many. "Read the instructions" and you'll know what to do. More boredom.

Educator / Learners

Learning is the ability to assimilate information into a meaningful and useful manner, to enhance an individual's knowledge, understanding and skills. It sounds like a learner is in a better place than a trainee or instructee.

Facilitator / Discoverers

Now, this is a term almost never spoken in a learning environment – Discoverers! Too bad. It is the most important, powerful way to learn. Self-discovery of information has a much higher rate of retention because – you guessed it – it was self-discovered!

The ah-ha moments of life are few and far between. A facilitator is one who sets up a learning environment that promotes the cause of self-discovery. If you ever wonder about the power of self-discovery, spend time in a preschool when children are "allowed" free play. Sit back and watch the excitement.

Teacher / Students

The word "teacher" has diminished in value over the years. So has the word "student." For many, it conjures up a rigid system of test taking, failure, punishment, homework, report cards, notes/calls from the principal, suspension and expulsion. The system is called school. School – a group of beings all being taught to follow the rules, conform to some standard and be constantly evaluated. School is the only place students can "fail" learning. Think about it.

Leader / Followers

Some refer to themselves as "workshop leaders." Gross! Here is education at its worst. Followers are mindless puppets that do whatever is asked of them. History should tell us this is the wrong term to use in education. "Lead, follow, or get out of the way. " I think this term should be dropped from any reference to education.

Presenter / Participants

A presenter operates on their agenda. The script has been written, the notes are in order, the transparencies lined up and the time clock is set. This will go on at this time and not a minute over. Presenters are only worried about covering their material. The participant is just that – there to participate in the presenter's agenda. Little value is given to the participants' outcomes.

So, which are you? It depends on how you view the learning experience. I do know this, after nearly 25 years of conducting learning opportunities for fellow human beings interested in the topic, one needs to be flexible to suit the audience.

How Does Learning Occur?

What a wonderful question to ask: How do human beings learn something? Let's examine the critical attributes of learning.

Experiences

Sounds simple enough, but people of all ages learn through experiences, and experiences can be either positive or negative. If you prick your finger with a pin, or get a paper cut, you learn what pain is. You might also learn about band-aids, and, how to prevent the pain from happening again. No guarantee on this one though!

People also learn from positive experiences. If someone calls attention to your efforts or accomplishments, you learn that trying or succeeding is a good thing.

Experiential learning has been shown to be the most powerful means of acquiring new attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills. Creating an environment that

embraces experiential learning will leave your audience in awe - just like preschoolers!

Cognitive and Affective Learning

People learn on two levels: on the cognitive level, which increases knowledge, understanding, facts, and the like; and the affective level, which promotes an awareness of emotions. Did you know that behavior is a combination of a person's knowledge and emotions at any given moment? If we behave in accordance to our knowledge and emotions, and if memories and feelings are the result of past experiences, if a learning environment was established that took into account cognitive and affective learning, new ideas, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors would emerge.

Active and Passive Learning

Active learning has been known to produce excited learners simply because learners who are active are doing something. But, being active all the time is tiring, so we have to sit down in the recliner of passive learning. Passive learners are observers. There is a value for both active and passive learning to occur in a learning experience. Take time to list the positive and negative aspects of active and passive learning.

Active and Passive Teaching

Not surprisingly, when the learner is active, the trainer is being a facilitator: promoting self-discovery. When the learner is passive, the facilitator now becomes the trainer. See the difference?

Combinations are Best

So, the optimal learning environment occurs when the learner is:

- a. alternating cognitive and affective modes of learning;
- b. alternating active and passive modes of engagement; and
- c. is engaged in experiential learning, promoting self-discovery.

To accomplish this, a learner needs a facilitator, a trainer, and an educator. Whoever said we couldn't be all things to all people!

Styles of Teaching

Choose the characteristics that best describe your style of teaching:

	Yes	No	Some- times
1. Lecturer	___	___	___
2. Overkill on personal experience	___	___	___
3. Hand wringer	___	___	___
4. Nervous Nelly	___	___	___
5. Soft spoken	___	___	___
6. Loud	___	___	___
7. Mumbler	___	___	___
8. Pacer	___	___	___
9. Stationary	___	___	___
10. Enjoying	___	___	___
11. Hands in the pocket/money jingler	___	___	___
12. Uses humor	___	___	___
13. Uses the term "ok" a lot	___	___	___
14. Makes eye contact	___	___	___
15. Uses transition noise (ah, um)	___	___	___
16. Boring	___	___	___
17. Too cognitive	___	___	___
18. Flexible	___	___	___
19. Sticks to agenda-always	___	___	___
20. Starts on time	___	___	___
21. Ends on time	___	___	___
22. Dresses casual	___	___	___
23. Dresses formal	___	___	___
24. Fast talker	___	___	___
25. Know-it-all	___	___	___
26. Entertainer	___	___	___
27. Apologizer	___	___	___
28. Preacher	___	___	___

Characteristics of Learners

Each group has its own personality, and within each training experience, individual personalities will emerge. Brainstorm strategies in handling the following personalities:

1. Dominates the group with personal experiences as answers to questions.
2. Snoozer – sleeps during workshop.
3. Acts as a "co-trainer."
4. Knows everything.
5. Challenger - challenges the trainer's comments.
6. Is clearly disengaged: reading the newspaper.
7. Knits during the training.
8. Talks to others all the time during the training.
9. Asks a lot of questions.
10. Is a head nodder – whatever you say, s/he agrees.
11. The absorber – takes in everything
12. The rescuer – bails out others.
13. Rebellious – finds no value in the training. Wants money back after third day.

Self-Rating Scale

The following characteristics are most often mentioned when describing a good workshop facilitator. Using the characteristics provided, rate yourself on a scale of 0 to 5 in each for the characteristics.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
1. Flexible	___	___	___	___	___	___
2. Creative	___	___	___	___	___	___
3. Knowledgeable	___	___	___	___	___	___
4. Respectful	___	___	___	___	___	___
5. Practical	___	___	___	___	___	___
6. Empathic	___	___	___	___	___	___
7. Appropriate Humor	___	___	___	___	___	___

Key

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 0 Not my style | 3 This is my style 50% of the time |
| 1 Hardly every my style | 4 Often |
| 2 Sometimes | 5 This is definitely my style |

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