

PREPARING FOR DIFFICULT PARTICIPANT SITUATIONS

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It is not a matter of if, but when, you will encounter a participant situation that challenges your knowledge and skills as a communicator and facilitator. Such instances can end in either a successful transfer of knowledge or a frustrating learning experience for everyone involved.

In order to reduce the likelihood that you will have to spend precious training time dealing with difficult situations, use the following preemptive strategies:

Strategy #1 - Prepare Yourself

To be effective as a trainer or facilitator, you will need many skills and a broad depth of knowledge. The more you know about training and development and human learning, the more likely you are to assist in transferring knowledge from a learning environment to the real world of your participants (e.g. workplace or home).

Some of the areas that you will need to become adept at include:

- Human behavioral styles
- Human motivation
- Concepts of adult learning
- Brain-based learning
- Multiple intelligences
- Training methodologies
- Active learning techniques
- Creative thinking
- Effective presentation/platform skills
- Training aid design and application
- Training equipment usage
- Specific subject matter

Strategy #2 - Prepare the Environment

Much has been learned about the impact that your training environment plays related to participants gaining, retaining, and being able to recall information and use their skills. When possible, select training venues that:

- Allow room for food, water, and other refreshments;
- Have ample space to rearrange furniture and equipment and to maximize movement and visibility;
- Have devices that allow control of lighting, electricity, and temperature easily

- accessible to you to reduce distractions and aid efficiency;
- Have windows that allow light in without providing a vessel for learners to look out and become distracted. Using blinds or arranging the room so that participants face away from windows often helps.
- Arrange furniture so that the entry doors are at the rear of the room and do not cause distraction as people enter and exit. Additionally, choose seating arrangements that provide maximum interaction between you and participants. By having access and eye contact with learners, you can often control behavior through a variety of non-verbal cues.
- Set up all equipment in advance and ensure that everyone in the room can clearly see what is being presented.

Strategy #3 - Prepare Your Session Content and Delivery

The key to any successful learning event is to prepare in advance and to consider possible contingency plans for a variety of situations. The following are a few ideas to help ensure that learning occurs:

- Set realistic, attainable learning objectives for your sessions. Your learners should be able to see a direct correlation between the objectives and what they will learn to their own situations. If they cannot, chances are that they will not buy into the program content and will become distracted in a number of ways. This can lead to distracting behavior. To assist in gaining learner support and acceptance, consider spending time at the beginning of your session reviewing planned objectives. As you do so, ask learners how they see the objective(s) applying to what they do.

You might also ask them what other objectives they have or what they want to gain from the session. Flip chart their ideas to make them visual and try to incorporate them into the training, if possible.

- Choose activities and learning strategies that add to, but do not distract from learning. Plan ways to engage and keep learners interested throughout your sessions.

One way to engage learners early in your session(s) is to plan an icebreaker activity in which they get to know one another while disclosing things they like and/or do not like in a training session. You can then use their responses to potentially reduce Problems later.

- Plan to develop and present guidelines or rules for the session. You can get better buy in by having learners spend some time at the beginning of a session developing their own list or adding to one you have already prepared. This list should contain such things as your roles and that of learners, break time protocol (e.g. return on time), and guidelines for questioning and interaction. I sometimes

present these guidelines in the form of a handout on colored paper with graphics called *Training Agreement* or *Training Contract*.

- Develop attractive, professional handouts and training aids that complement your presentation of information and reinforce learning. Make sure that you consider the possible needs of all learners (e.g. participants with language deficits or those with various disabilities). Using such materials also helps ensure that participants with different learning modalities and needs have access to information and can learn at their own pace and comfort level. By doing these things, you can potentially reduce a participant's reluctance to become involved or an obsessive feeling that they need to continually ask for clarification or give input. You also potentially increase their understanding of program content.
- Consider creative strategies that you will use to group participants for activities and if necessary separate them in a seemingly random fashion.
- Plan creative strategies for selecting group leaders and volunteers so that you can involve participants in the learning.
- Practice, Practice, Practice! You cannot practice enough. Spend time rehearsing in the actual training environment that you will use for your session(s), if possible.
- Spend time rehearsing in the actual training environment that Have the equipment and materials you plan to use in your training on hand so that you get used to manipulating and referring to them. Consider having other knowledgeable trainers watch your rehearsal and provide feedback.

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