

SCHEDULING SUCCESSFUL LEARNING EVENTS

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The obvious goal of any learning event is to provide or enhance the knowledge, skills and attitudes of attendees. In preparing to do this, you will need to do your homework and decide many things related to the format, content, delivery, location, materials needed and much more. When designing your learning event, a major consideration is when to hold the event and the timing of it.

Scheduling

Through trial and error, many public seminar companies and trainers have learned that certain days, days of the week, and time periods work better than others for conducting training events. Consider the following when choosing when to hold your workshop(s):

Day of the Week. In many cases a learner's attendance at a workshop will be influenced by his or her job, position, work environment (whether management supports training), job responsibilities, and a multitude of other issues. Even so, some days of the week typically work better than others for people to attend.

Monday is often universally a day when people are returning to work from the weekend, vacation or a business trip. This day tends to be stressful and packed with tasks or catch-up work and responsibilities. For these reasons, Mondays should probably be avoided when scheduling your workshop.

Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday are typically safe days to schedule learning events for most people. Attendees have often caught up on work assignments on Monday and are not yet focused on taking off for the weekend. In the latter instance, many people take three- and four-day weekends and use Mondays and Fridays as part of that event.

Fridays are often good days for workshops because many people get all their work caught up during the week in preparation for being gone on Friday. This is especially true when you are holding the workshop offsite in a desirable location, such as near a resort or tourist area where families can accompany your attendees. Further, if a Friday session ends early, attendees either go back to their office to finish last minute items or can get a bit of extra time for their weekend.

Saturdays work well for self-development workshops or business retreats that are followed by a social gathering. If the workshop is at a remote location, people can arrive early, relax, spend the night then, make a weekend of the event with their families or friends following the workshop. One drawback for Saturday sessions is that some religions hold services on that day.

Sunday is sometimes used for personal development workshops, but Saturday tends to work better for most people for such events. Many people reserve Sunday to spend

time with their family and friends, or to attend religious services. Business meetings work better on other days of the week.

Time of the Day. When selecting the time period, do not forget to consider factors over which you have no control. These might include traffic patterns (rush hours), your audience (professionals who normally start work at 8:00 to 9:00 a.m., shift workers, or work at home people who have flexible schedules), or other organizational commitments (planned events like picnics, celebrations, large sales meetings, or annual conferences) that would require attendance by potential attendees.

Half-day workshops are normally scheduled between 8 a.m. and noon or noon, or 12:30, and 4:30 or 5:00 p.m. Full-day sessions are typically scheduled between 8:30 or 9:00 a.m. and 4:30 or 5:00 p.m. with lunch and breaks included. Keep in mind that trainers who conduct afternoon sessions often encounter learners who are mentally winding down around 4 or 4:30 p.m. and starting to think about packing up to leave in order to beat traffic and get home.

If you are conducting multi-day workshops, consider when to start and end, especially if attendees will be traveling to the meeting. It is often good to start a bit later on the first day and end a bit early on the last day. This will allow people who are commuting from a distance or using public transportation, such as a plane or train, to make arrangements that will get them to the workshop on the morning of the session rather than incurring the expense of overnight accommodations. They can also catch early transportation to arrive at home and not have to spend an extra night after the session ends. Otherwise, they would incur additional expenses and lost productivity time that might dissuade them from attending.

If you are planning an evening workshop, consider the fact that rush hour traffic may delay attendee arrival. Additionally, unless you are providing food, people will need to grab something to eat on their way or to bring to the session. Such sessions typically start between 5:30 and 6:00 p.m. and end between 9:30 and 10:00 p.m.

An alternative schedule is to conduct a noontime “lunch and learn” event for which people arrive at 11:30 and leave at 1:00 and either bring their lunches or have them provided. This is often a good time slot for quick refresher content, short presentations on a given topic, or to introduce concepts, policies, products, procedures, or regulatory information.

Your topic focus will drive your schedule in many cases. For example, personal development or self-help type workshops are best as an evening events following work or in some cases on a weekend. Since many people are reluctant to give up their weekends with family and friends, the latter might not be the best choice.

A final consideration regarding the timeframe of your event is that rather than doing three days consisting of six-hour days, you may want to consider two nine-hour days. This saves expense because you do not have to pay staff, purchase food and rent a

facility for three days. Additionally, learners are not away from their offices as long and can save travel expenses.

Month. Various times of the year are more conducive to better attendance than others. The time of year selected for your workshop is important to its success. Additionally, it can determine where you hold it. For example, if you are holding your workshop in the winter, you may want to consider a warm climate location to which people can get easy transportation or access.

In deciding when to hold your event, consider the following points:

January through May are typically good months to hold a workshop except for the first couple of weeks of January. This is because January follows the holiday season and many people are getting ready for the New Year and getting back into a routine after being out of the office for extended periods. In addition, if you are in colder areas of the country or world, travel could be an issue for people. As for any other months, you should avoid major public and religious holidays.

June through August might clash with vacation schedules while children are out of school. Depending in what part of the world you are holding the workshop, the weather can be hot during this period.

September through early November are often good months for workshops since travel is not impacted by weather and there are not many major holidays during the period. In the United States, the end of November is not good due to Thanksgiving when many families travel or vacation.

Early December works well but, after the middle of the month, you should avoid scheduling a session because of conflicts with the major religious holiday seasons.

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