

Focus and energy: making learning memorable



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Key learning points

- Learning is sharing ownership of the process.
- Trainers drive commitment by creating motivation to learn.
- 7 S's – using hard and soft S's to drive training design.
- The trainer balances passion and direction.
- Successful trainers are excellent learners.

Introduction

During a recent Train the Trainer event, the following question arose: 'When do we know that we have the right balance of content and process in learning sessions?'. Many experienced trainers or facilitators believe that this balance is founded on experience of designing and running events. Some believe they have the competence to manage this process

unconsciously. Our contention is that such a belief may be the first sign of trainer complacency. Trainers may focus too much attention on their hard-earned experience, failing to develop a fresh mindset for designing the learning process. With this in mind, we are focusing on examining the major issues to be addressed. The overriding contention is that the power to influence, motivate, captivate, and create a memorable learning experience is within the trainer. Although systems and techniques are important, the energy within is what makes the difference.

Manage the learning environment

As a trainer, your core responsibility is to develop a holistic approach to learning, and to manage that environment for your learners. Focus on the process of learning. Many

trainers and educators make the mistake of focusing on training input, material or content instead.

Think back to an earlier time, to being a learner subjected to vast amounts of content delivered by traditional trainers or teachers. Retention was not always high – although the event may have been memorable for the wrong reasons. This is a classic error in conveying learning to others. Learning is not something that you give. It is an experience to be used to motivate others. Overuse of the traditional route of training, or imparting, learning, is still the major complaint of learners, students and programme participants. The big problem is that high-quality content or data overload rules, and this is too often more of a priority for the trainer than supporting others in wanting to take responsibility for their own ability to learn.

You cannot have top-quality training without top-quality trainers

If learning is to be memorable, you have to ensure that it meets the criteria that make it memorable. The event may be well designed and presented, yet if the process does not support the challenges faced by the learner, then the value of the event is questionable. Starting with the end in mind is a great vision for a learning or training event. Being firmly grounded in reality and supporting the learner has to be the key issue for training design – but it is not the whole story.

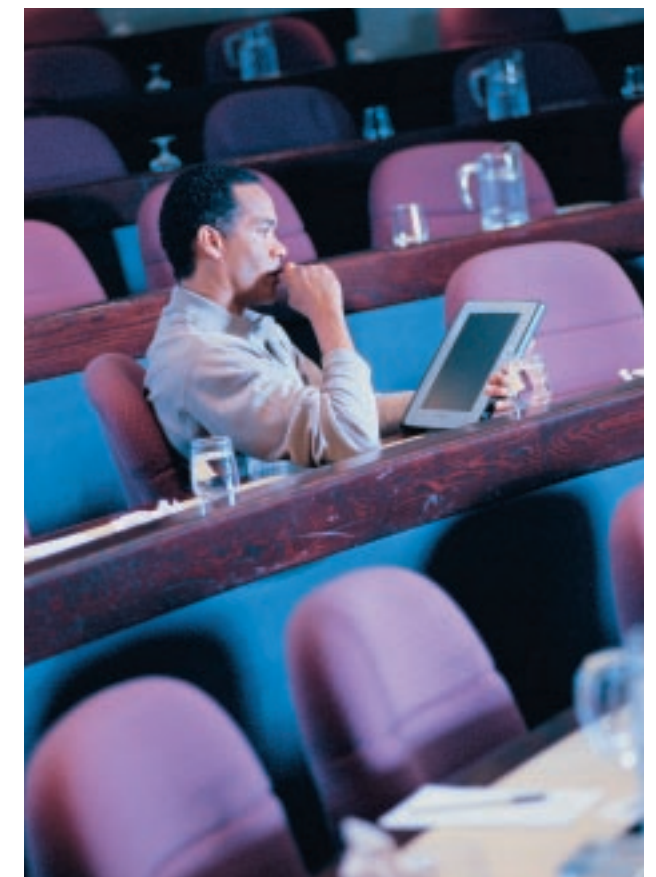
You – the trainer, facilitator or coach – make the difference. Learners or participants should regard you as a great asset. When they return to their work, you should have a high expectation of being invited again. You should be confident that the word will spread about the experience you designed being truly memorable.

Your image as facilitator or trainer should ensure that you are seen as a core asset who enables people to achieve their objectives with clarity and ease. Now, does this image that we have outlined tally with your personal image? This is a tough self-assessment test because, although there may be tools, techniques and methodologies to apply to make training a memorable and valuable event, the key factor is the trainer. Great delivery is dependent on a sound design structure. The two go together.

The trainer or facilitator may have all the tools for a great event. One of the most powerful is that of reflection, self-analysis and personal learning. The trainer needs to have a high degree of insight into their own learning and performance. A really great trainer is pretty good at self-disclosure and will value coaching from others. Great trainers are not tied up with ego, but are truly committed to the learning process. They are also probably selfish in that they want to learn more and more about themselves, in order to understand how to communicate well.

Making training memorable can be viewed as applying a series of tools and techniques or even gimmicks; but real, memorable, lasting learning comes

from high-quality trainers. Of course, they will be versed in the best practice, they will have mastered the psychology of learning, and will have designed and delivered to a variety of audiences. They will demonstrate flexibility, but memorable training does not come from computer-based training or from a software package. Memorable learning that lasts a lifetime has to be lit by the radiance of energy and passion, coupled with systems that glow within. That is where the core to real learning resides. And you, as trainer and learner, know that when you think back to that special school teacher, mentor, business colleague or trainer who inspired you, making a difference in motivating you to learn and excel. It resides within, but not every trainer allows it to shine.



References

- 1 Philip Atkinson, *Shaping Customer Focus*, Transformations UK Ltd, 1999; see Chapter 2.

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Gimmicks and tricks are for no one

There is always scope to ensure that learning is memorable, but tricks and tips do little to foster true learning. As a trainer, you will adopt a professional approach to designing the process to make learning memorable. The last thing you require is participants recalling negatively an event you stage. Recently, we witnessed gimmicks used to bad effect. At a conference, we observed an external trainer. As a person answered questions or contributed to group discussion, a wrapped sweet would land on their lap or bounce off their forehead. It reminded us of a visit to the pelican enclosure at the zoo. This gimmick must have worked with someone once, but it was not going to work at this event. After this trainer's session, he handed over to us for our session. It took us some time to win over the very disgruntled audience. Tricks do not enhance the learning process – this one would simply make the session memorable for the wrong reasons.

It is easy for trainers to become attracted to novel techniques. We believe that any gimmick must be founded upon good practice. Managing the learning process is a robust affair, founded upon good sense and relevant research, not fairground tricks.

Training design: learning to learn

As trainer, you manage the learning environment. The phrase trips off the tongue, but there are too many providers of training and learning who know little of the psychology of learning. There needs to be a focus on managing the process of communication between those who teach and those who are the recipients of learning – using what is normally referred to as facilitator skills. The context of learning situations varies widely. What follows will concentrate on general issues. It is critical to acquire the basic skills and knowledge. Training is not just a matter of good presentation skills – rather, it involves being able to integrate and apply some fairly intricate psychological tools and techniques with a high degree of confident presentation.

Fundamentally, making learning memorable is not a training design issue, but a matter of exerting an inner drive to stimulate and energise others to want to learn. To integrate the systems and the passion, we use a simple model. We have used a consultancy model, a novel

application of McKinsey's 7 S's' outline, as a tool to design learning strategies. The 7 S's model was originally intended for diagnosing strategies for change management, but it has been adapted to clarify the creation of strategies for learning. The approach focuses on both 'hard-S' and 'soft-S' issues. The hard issues provide the superstructure for any learning event, and are the building blocks that enable learning to become memorable. The soft ones focus on providing energy and passion within the learning process.

The model

The 7 S's model is useful and easy to remember. It is important to focus on blending the hard and soft S's. The hard S's are the tangible, structural components and framework around which training or learning is designed. They give direction, focus, rigour and reliability, and comprise a structure upon which to build assessment. The soft S's focus on creating ownership for learning. They galvanise the energies of learner and trainer or facilitator in a joint process of discovery, and create

the climate, atmosphere and passion for learning – the motivation and enjoyment of learning for its own sake. Blending hard and soft S's creates a subtle synergy between trainer and learner that enhances the learning process.

When the trainer takes the time to design the process along these lines, they will differentiate themselves significantly from others who design events. The results will demonstrate a well-formed outcome for trainer and learner. Because the trainer has designed the process around the desired outcomes and the learning preferences of their audience, little can go wrong. As a structure, this is suitable for designing learning events for from five to five hundred people.

Motivation to excel has to be the mindset of the trainer

The key to providing a true learning experience lies in recognising that any event is an opportunity to design a memorable process. A trainer, in our view, has to want to do well. They have to want to be appraised in the top 10 per cent; otherwise they should seek different work. Helping others learn is too important to be left to people who are only 70 per cent committed to doing a good job. Training – in fact, any learning activity – is highly valued because there is little time to commit to taking people out of the business. Therefore you do not play with learning. Because of the pressures we are all under in business today, attendance at a training or a learning event is often highly prized, and viewed as a reward and an investment in the future. To ensure that this investment is valued, the trainer should design a high-calibre programme and process. It goes without saying that the quality of the trainer dictates the quality of the learning.

7 S's score for making learning memorable

Hard S's	Typical issues
<p>STRATEGY Goals, objectives, desired outcomes, behavioural changes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have desired outcomes been defined in behavioural terms? • Is there clarity in terms of development of learning in a staged, programmed manner? • Have common language and terms been identified and understood? • Have we defined, with precision, the objectives for attitude change, knowledge acquisition and skills development?
<p>STRUCTURE Sequencing, cause/effect relationships, lesson or training plans</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are learning activities logically sequenced? • Have we examined critical cause/effect relationships that allow progression of learning against timeframes? • Have we ensured that participants or learners have contributed, taking ownership of their development plans? • How do these development plans fit with organisational and departmental objectives? • Have we ensured that the experience of the training or learning event will have a high degree of transferability to the workplace?
<p>SYSTEMS Methods of assessing progress</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have we assessed creative methods for capturing learning? • Have we created equitable methods for assessing progress? • Has adequate emphasis been devoted to self-assessment? • How can peer assessment enrich the process of learning? • Have we considered criteria for learning that are consistent, in terms of assessment and accreditation with internal and external agencies, and other professional and technical groupings?
Soft S's	
<p>STYLE Style of learning, preferred learning patterns</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What options are available to fit trainer or facilitator style to the learning preferences of learners? • Have we fully incorporated credible alternative and creative forms of learning? • Is the trainer able to flex between learning more structure and methods of experiential techniques?
<p>SKILLS Acquiring the ASK pattern (Attitudes, Skills and Knowledge)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have we jointly identified, with each learner, the attitudes, skills and knowledge to be imparted? • Are we confident that we have captured the learner's previous practical experience? • Have we measured current learner proficiency? • What steps are we taking to develop a gap analysis between the current and the desired levels of learning?
<p>STAFF Learner- or tutor-centred, learning preferences</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have we developed a series of trainer and learner strategies to enable all in the learning set to move beyond current styles to practise new behaviours? • Have we incorporated sufficient group learning to advance average capability? • Are we sufficiently focused to identify and take action to address individual issues?
<p>SHARED VALUES Common ground, value of learning methods</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we advance the value of learning and integrate it with personal and organisational development? • Is there scope to use learning contracts with learners and their line managers? • On an intuitive level, how can we develop the platform for a strong commitment (psychological contract) to be forged with merging individual and organisational objectives? • What specific actions can we take and measure for ensuring a commitment to life-long learning, uniting all staff and learners?