

Life-long Learning through Training Meetings

PMM5 Postscript[™] Number 10

Background Information: In Chapter 8, Small Meetings Management by MaryAnne Bobrow proves that small does not mean uncomplicated. She also points out that “a small meeting is classified by the number of participants, not by its perceived importance” (Bobrow, 2006, p. 106).

PMM5 Postscript[™] Use: This PMM5 Postscript[™] specifically talks about training meetings. Typically, training meetings are small meetings that are essential for organizations. Many meeting managers, both in associations, corporations and non-for profits, are responsible for planning training meetings. Economic realities and changing technology mandate that all people continue to adapt and develop new skills. The importance of life-long learning continues to drive the need for effective training meetings. The PMM5 Postscript[™] also includes additional group discussion or research projects to supplement the PMM5 chapter.

The PMM5 Postscript[™] Number 24 (Adult Learning Styles), Number 25 (Adult Learning Principles, Number 31 (Writing Effective Learner Outcomes) also directly relate to training meetings.

Learner Outcomes: At the completion of this reading, you should be able to:

- Describe experiential learning.
- List options for creating experiential learning experiences.
- Construct recommendations to improve training meetings.

Related PMM5 Chapter: Chapter 8, Small Meetings Management: Small Does Not Mean Uncomplicated
Author: MaryAnne Bobrow, CAE, CMP



Training vs. Learning

All meetings have a learning element in them. From Webster comes these definitions:

Training — To form by instruction, discipline or drill
Learning — To come to be able and to realize

Adults in meetings don't want to be trained; they want to learn.

Whether meeting managers are specifically charged with "training" meeting, most meeting managers are interested in having people retain and "realize" the meeting message. With today's focus on meeting value, all meeting managers want participants to leave meetings with new skills, new attitudes and new information.

Life Long Learning is Needed

A key strategy for increasing employee retention and their satisfaction level is to focus on their development. Employee development focuses on:

- Knowledge
- Skills
- Abilities

In a "Work Trends" study conducted by Rutgers University, among workers who have received training from their employees, 91% said that the training helped them be more productive at work.

The more that Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes (KSA's) are linked to the current organization's needs and goals, the easier it will be to create more satisfied employees who are also more productive.

Adults in the Classroom

Children are sponges. They don't carry pre-conceived knowledge with them. They ask a lot of questions. Adults are different.

Adults learn best when the material is:

- Job relevant
- Presented in integrated concepts
- Oriented to solving a problem
- Visual as well as aural

In addition, adult learners approach training with the following expectations:

- They will receive positive feedback and reinforcement
- Their experience will be valued and recognized
- They will have the ability to challenge and be challenged during the training

These expectations shape the need for interactive, involving, multi-sensory training meetings.

Training Checklist

Meeting managers can revitalize training meetings in multiple ways:

- **Use imaginative seating arrangements.** Don't simply rely on classroom or theater style seating. The physical arrangement of the room is powerful and sends a message to participants.
- **Invoke the senses.** Use color, music, physical activity and other sensory elements to trigger learning.
- **Find out about the audience.** Know the company, know the objectives for the training and understand what the audience already knows. Ask a small group of people before the meeting or encourage the trainer to survey the attendees during the meeting to get to the true objectives.
- **Place responsibility on the learner.** Participants play a role in their own learning. They must be open, focused and willing. Start off training sessions with the message that they carry some responsibility for their own learning.
- **Plan for differences.** Be aware of generational, cultural and gender differences in the audience. Generally, it is best to prepare to appeal to all learning styles (visual, auditory and kinesthetic). However, if the audience will be heavily weighted with people of a specific generation, culture or gender, make certain that presenters know this and prepare appropriately. The PMM5 Postscript™ Number 26 addresses generational differences
- **Start right out of the box.** Create ways to trigger learning. People often arrive early for sessions, so offer them something meaningful to fill that time. For example, use puzzles or word searches, place table tents with questions written on them, or post articles around the room.
- **Allow time for absorption.** People's attention span maxes out at 20 minutes. Break up the material with Q and A with the audience, small group activities, reflection, or an actual break. PMM5 Postscript™ Number 30 offers suggestions for reflection.
- **Bring them back.** Breaks are important but can also be a trouble spot if people don't return back on time. Suggestions for trainers: Have everyone synchronize their watches, start back at an odd time -- 10:21 rather than 10:20. Or offer people a raffle ticket if they return back from break on time. At the end of the day raffle off a few prizes. Another trick: Before the break, encourage the leader to save one tidbit ("Oh, I almost forgot the best thing. I will tell you when you return from break.") till after the break.
- **Allow time for sharing.** When people really know material, they are in a position to explain it. Allow people to share in pairs (dyads), groups of three (triads), or small groups what they have learned. Consult resources like Bob Pike's and Lynn Solem's book, *50 Creative Training Closers: Innovative Ways to End Your Training with IMPACT!*, for more suggestions.
- **Build the bridge back to reality.** Allow time for people to build an action plan between what they have learned and how they will apply in on the job. Tom McDonald, President of Dr. Tom McDonald & Associates, suggests using these questions — "What will I do now?" or "What are the risks if I don't?" Whether it is in evaluations and/or action planning, create a bridge between what people learned and experienced and how they will use the new knowledge.

Simulate to Stimulate

Training meetings, like other meetings, suffer from an over-abuse of PowerPoint slides and lecture oriented teaching.

Holly Dolezalek reports on Kimberly-Clark's approach. The company found that after repeated efforts to teach employees with PowerPoint about supply chain management, many employees still didn't understand the material. Others got it, but couldn't remember the information three months after they'd learned about.

With limited time and budget, Michael Fisher, Kimberly-Clark's director of organizational effectiveness, created a training event that was part simulation/part game/part video presentations.

The training was about supply chain management. The information was presented visually on a discovery map. Then in small teams, members received roles in a fictional company that was bringing a product to market and they were guided through the pitfalls of supply chain management. At the end of this role-play employees discovered that a competitor had beaten them to market with a similar product.

This first session served as a springboard to a second discovery map, which guided employees through a discussion about the future of Kimberly-Clark's supply chain. Teams earned points for finding information on the map, and the winning team received key chains or other company logo items. Then employees watched a video message from the CEO and their sector presidents.

In the call-to-action segment of the training, participants suggested ways to eliminate waste and redundancies in Kimberly-Clark's supply chain management to the tune of \$275 million in cost savings.

After the sessions, employees said they finally understood how Kimberly-Clark's supply chain really worked (Dolezalek, 2003).

Choices and Options

The Kimberly-Clark example utilized a combination of techniques. Meeting managers can recommend these options from the simple to the complex.

- **Games/exercises** — Games can be icebreakers or creativity exercises. There are customized board games that teach people specific skills, like financial fundamentals or management. Games can also be delivered via video/computer.
- **Simulations** — At the simplest level a role-play is a simulation. Other simulations are more complex where people assume roles in literal situations (you will be running a company) or more metaphorical situations (you are part of a team climbing a mountain).
- **Informal learning** — Depending upon the course, the people you meet and work with during a training course can be just as valuable as the information. Fortune Magazine reported that if you ask any GE person about the value of attending Crotonville, the company's fabled leadership institute, the answer always is "The people I met were more important than the courses I took." This example underscores the importance of time for breaks, informal networking, and small group work.

- **Fun** — A cursory glance may suggest it's all just fun. But the fun can create a positive learning state. Moreover, the element of fun can disguise multiple approaches to different learning styles.

What Fun and Games Buys You

Fun and games do work. This ancient Chinese proverb explains why.

I hear and I forget
I see and I remember
I do and I understand

These techniques (role plays, simulations, games) fall into a category known as experiential learning or accelerated learning. Oftentimes, people will also call it discovery learning.

The premise is simple: People are engaged and involved so that they internalize and absorb the real learning. They are discovering it for themselves.

Accelerated learning recognizes that different people learn differently. To appeal to a variety of learners, accelerated learning proposes that the dry lecture approach is replaced with a multitude of learning methods and reinforcement techniques. The key is variety, enjoyment and involving the participant.

Dave Meier, director of the Center for Accelerated Learning, promotes accelerated learning as a way to reduce design time and enhance learning time. The ancient Greeks' notions of learning included experience, feedback, and mental engagement. It's only recently that the academic and corporate world has rejected the traditional approach of read-lecture-test in favor of accelerated learning (Meier, 2000).

Companies like Kimberly-Clark and Rolls Royce are enjoying the benefits of accelerated learning. Harvard Business School uses simulations in their MBA program, executive level and courses in corporate universities.

Games are not the only way to improve the effectiveness of training meetings.

Lessons Worth Repeating

In 2002, Ford Motor Company was working to improve customer service. Most people dread the dentist, public speaking and taking their car to the dealer for service. So Ford underwent an extensive training program called "On the Lane".

Importantly, Ford recognized that holding a training program, even an extensive program is not enough. With almost 5000 dealerships in the US, Ford was concerned about making the training "stick" with people after they were back in their own environment each of which possesses a different spin on the importance of "customer service."

The problem is typical in dealer management organizations and many other organizations - People go for training, people return trained, but there isn't any reinforcement for the lessons and what is learned is quickly forgotten.

So Ford built in a refund of the cost of the class to the dealers if their service standards improved (McMaster, 2000).

A training meeting won't be effective, won't deliver value or deliver on the objectives if it is a one-time only event. To be effective, people must work in an environment where what they learned is reinforced and valued. Training can be reinforced by many strategies including:

- Create a coaching network to harness the power of experienced employees. Encourage employees to identify 3 individuals with their manager who can provide coaching and feedback to build capabilities after the training.
- Share new found knowledge with their managers, peers and team members about what they learned, what new skills were developed and what on-the-job plans they have to improve their results.
- Outline the "so what" of the training experience. Ask participants to answer the question, "What are they going to do more of, less of, or differently when back on the job?"

Summary

Training meetings are one type of specialized meetings that many meeting managers plan. Training meetings have an important and critical purpose for organizations. The meeting logistics must create a learning environment that is suited to the audience, type of training and delivery of training.

Moving training into the realm of experiential training will engage participants and create a more memorable, interactive class. Meeting managers can make arrangements for and recommendations of components that will create a more positive learning environment.

With a predicted talent shortage, it is imperative for all organizations to fully capitalize on training opportunities to retain and train people.

Group Discussion or Projects

1. Larry Keltto included this quiz in his article, Where Training Goes Wrong - The question is: Three days after a training session, how much of the information will a typical attendee have retained? The answer is 10%. What can a meeting manager do to help improve upon this disastrous result? (Keltto, 2001)
2. What type of meeting room set-up is conducive to training meetings? Why?
3. What type of Audio Visual equipment or tools might be useful for training meetings?
4. What are the downsides (perceived and real) to experiential training?
5. If a meeting manager has little control over the content of a training meeting, how can they help ensure positive results?

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