

# THE TRAINER AS A FACILITATOR

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January 9, 2014

Every year, thousands of training sessions and workshops are delivered to managers at every level around the country to every kind of organization. Some are successful and some are not. In my experience, those most successful are those in which the trainer *facilitates*, as he or she *trains*.

To understand the difference between training as a facilitator and simply training, one must ask, “What is the reason for developing a training program in the first place?”

In general terms, the answer is, “To offer a training experience that will provide participants with the information needed to enhance their performance.”

Implicit in this answer is the following assumption:



Simply providing information in a training session does not guarantee that performance will be enhanced. Enhancing performance means changing a behavior or behaviors in some way.

To effect behavior change, training must be more than simply the imparting of information. It must be *a facilitative experience that both stimulates and guides participants to change*.

## Trainers and Facilitators

There is a difference between a traditional *trainer* who trains and a *facilitator* who trains.

- ◆ **From session to session, trainers simply impart the same information to their audiences drawn from one**
- ◆ **or more organizations**—frequently in a one-shot training session lasting anywhere from one or two hours to a three-day workshop. Although they may include role playing and exercises, for the most part they leave it to the training participants to apply that information in their own work environments.
- ◆ **Facilitators get to know their trainees before the training begins so they can tailor their presentations to the specific needs of the participants.** Also, because changing behavior takes time, they spread the training in sessions over a period of time—anywhere from six to twelve weeks to a year. In each meeting, they give participants exercises to practice what they have learned and discuss those exercises in subsequent sessions. Further, they monitor and reinforce individual participants as they apply the exercises, and they coach and guide individual participants throughout the learning process.

More often than not, a trainer is simply a vendor who sells a product (a training session) to interested organizations.

A facilitator, on the other hand, does more than sell a product. A facilitator conducts an *intervention*—he or she gets to know something about the organizational culture, develops relationships with the participants even before training begins, and actively serves as a change agent to the organization.

## The Trainer-As-A-Facilitator Strategy

As a facilitator, I begin the development of a training program by interviewing the participants. Using a manager training program as an example, the aim of my interviews is three-fold:

### 1. *To establish rapport*

The goal of the training is to give the training participants information and tools they will use to enhance their performance. This means I must create a learning atmosphere that stimulates participants to accept information and see the value of the tools I offer. In my experience, I must overcome three barriers to create such an atmosphere:

- The first barrier is the *outsider barrier*. During my years of practice as a facilitator, I've found one of the first reactions when people meet with me for the first time is to see me as an outsider. They often adopt a stand-off stance. "What can I learn from someone who isn't part of this business?" "How can you possibly know about all of the little things I'm faced with and am up against every day?"
- The second barrier is the *expert barrier*. Some people—particularly those who are new or insecure in their jobs—are fearful. "He's an expert. He'll see right through me and spot my weaknesses." As a result, they are less open, more defensive, and may be threatened by any change I suggest.
- The third barrier is the *management barrier*. Upon first meeting me, people see me as allied with management. It was management, after all, who hired me. Those most insecure fear that I will report back all of their deficiencies to management and put them in a bad light. (This, by the way, is often a very difficult barrier to overcome for trainers who are part of a training department in the organization in which they are training—they, after all, are accountable to management.)

Establishing rapport in a one-on-one setting helps me overcome these three barriers to learning. It gives me an opportunity to connect with the participants, to ease their fears. It allows me to develop a bond of trust and show them that I am someone who is genuinely interested in their betterment—not someone who is evaluating them and reporting back to management.

### 2. *To explore how each of them see their role as a manager.*

What do they see as their priorities—their most important job, their next most important job, and so on? I always have an initial plan for the content of the training sessions based on what I was contracted to do. But it's important for me to see where individual participants are starting from. This helps me reshape and tailor my plan with information and strategies that will be more effective in stimulating real behavioral change for each of them.

Knowing how they individually view their role as a manager tells me what information, strategies, and techniques I must use to most effectively stimulate them to apply what they learn in their own work environment.

### 3. *To learn something about each manager's working environment.*

One can't assume that all managers have the same work environment, even in the same organization. The fact is, the way managers perform depends on the mix of personalities they are managing, the physical environment in which they are managing, the policies and procedures they must follow, and the degree of contact they have with customers and vendors. I can get a feel for the "climate" of a manager's work environment by meeting with him or her in that environment and observing what goes on.

Knowledge of managers' work environments gives me more information to guide me in my selection of information, strategies, and techniques to use to most effectively stimulate them to *apply* what they are learning.

Using the information I gather during these interviews, I finalize and prepare the content of my training program. In doing so, I follow guidelines offered by education experts who have studied factors that influence adult learning. Adult educators have identified specific characteristics of adult learners. I take each of these characteristics into account when finalizing a training program:

<b>CHARACTERISTICS OF ADULT LEARNERS</b>	<b>FEATURES OF THE TRAINING PROGRAM</b>
◆ Working adults are more goal-oriented—they are motivated to learn what will have a more immediate payoff for them personally.	◆ I develop individual training goals for each participant for each training session by matching the results of the initial interviews to the session's training content.
◆ Working adults want a reason for learning something—learning for them will be more effective if it is applicable and valuable to their work.	◆ Throughout the training sessions, I ask participants to contribute and discuss “case examples” from their own work settings to illustrate and apply the topics covered.
◆ Working adults learn more effectively if learning is connected to the foundation of life experience and knowledge they have accumulated throughout their lives.	◆ I tie discussions of such topics as communication and relationship building to that foundation of life experience and knowledge with examples from both work and personal lives.
◆ Working adults put a premium on time. Wrapped in busy schedules that demand their time and efforts in many directions, they are often resistant to the notion of taking time out for training sessions.	◆ To overcome such resistance, I schedule training sessions at times convenient to the participants as much as possible, and I ask top management to emphasize the importance of the training by making it a top time-priority.
◆ Given their busy working lives, adult workers more effectively retain what they learn when they are given opportunities to practice it over a period of time.	◆ I include exercises in each training session to give the managers the opportunity to both practice what they are learning in their own work environment. They then discuss their experiences in a subsequent session.

It is well known that most adults “learn by doing.” I therefore conduct training sessions more like seminars than lectures. Although I present some basic information in each session, most meetings are centered around discussions and applications of the information presented. Because I establish a rapport with each participant in my initial interviews, I find it easier to stimulate even the most introverted of them to actively participate in discussions.

## **To Sum Up**

In other words, facilitators do more than simply impart information. They are active catalysts of change. They get to know and learn something about each of the individual participants and their work environment, and develop trusting relationships with them.

Developing those relationships enables them to better tailor the training objectives and content to the unique styles of each participant. It also gives facilitators insight into what strategies will be most effective in coaching and reinforcing individual participants as they apply what they learn.

The trainer as a facilitator conducts an organizational intervention aimed at behavior change and thus is likely to have more impact on the people he or she trains than does a traditional trainer.