

Less Teaching... More Learning

To engage your learners and ensure knowledge transfer, incorporate a four-pronged approach in your training sessions. **BY MICHAEL ROSENTHAL**



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Q While I have been working in L&D for several years, the combination of a promotion and a consolidation now demands that I facilitate soft-skills workshops, as well. I want my sessions to stand out, engage the audience, and result in knowledge transfer. Any tips?

A: We've all attended workshops that practically put us to sleep. Our energies were spent battling to keep our eyes open and to at least appear to be engaged, instead of absorbing what was being taught. And most of us have had the pleasure of participating in sessions that enlivened us and left us motivated to change and improve.

Certainly, as learning professionals, we want our workshops to be among the latter, if not for learning's sake than for our own sanity, professional satisfaction, and job security.

For the most part, adults learn skills through action and reflection. One can't learn to swim by simply reading a book or attending a lecture, despite the presenter's mastery of language, PowerPoint, or multimedia. Instead, the learner has to get in the water and practice. They refine their breathing and strokes by experiencing and correcting for coughing, sinking, and inefficiency. The same holds true for almost any skill improvement—it's how we learn.

Accordingly, incorporate a four-pronged approach in your training sessions:

1. Limit the amount of frontal lecture. Facilitators have many great ideas that we want to share with our audience. We've been conditioned by the preponderance of lecture-based workshops to think we're expected to fill the time by talking—and that the more information we bring, the better. But we know from our own first-hand experience as participants in other workshops that lecture is not the path to engagement.

When it comes to lecture, less is more, as long as you make sure to present impactful

material. Skip the appetizers. Go straight to the main course. Deliver your content in bite-sized portions. Let the audience chew on them and digest them before serving more.

2. Include lots of subject-focused action.

Note that action for action's sake alone is not valuable. Ice-breaker exercises such

as tossing a ball to fellow participants in order to learn their names has its place, but it does not constitute action related to the subject material. Instead, design exercises that help the nuggets presented in your lectures come alive. For example, if you're teaching negotiation skills, it's more important that you have exercises on negotiation than on ice breaking.

3. Relate the subject matter to the audience's particular needs. Demonstrate how the workshop will improve their professional lives the moment they leave the classroom. At our firm, we do this by creating case study exercises for each audience; the case studies reflect the unique challenges faced by those participants. In the negotiations skills example, we would present a negotiation context that the participants face in their everyday work, have them apply the concepts that were presented in an interactive-lecture (i.e., the audience would be encouraged to comment and pose questions throughout the presentation), and role-play with facilitators.

4. Teach what the audience wants to learn. Often, facilitators establish an agenda of what we think we should teach. Instead, we should create an environment that allows the audience to guide us about what they want to learn and what would be most valuable to them. Ideally, you will have the breadth and depth of knowledge—and flexible disposition—to take the conversation wherever the participants want to take it, so long as it stays on topic. This takes the guesswork out of what to say, and helps ensure that your audience is engaged and walks away with skills they will apply back at their desks. **E**