Train the trainer – basic

Fiona Beddoes-Jones

Key learning points

- **What Train the trainer – basic is.**
- **What inexperienced trainers do.**
- **What it's useful to know and remember.**
- **Building your confidence.**
- **Basic training pitfalls to avoid: inexperience derailers.**

What Train the trainer – basic is

This article comes in two parts: basic and advanced. This one covers more than just the basics, though; it has been written to identify clearly those things which, as a new or inexperienced trainer, it will be really useful for you to know and remember. Drawing on more than 20 years of experience, it was an interesting exercise for me to think back to my first training job – I was thrown in at the deep end with little or no help; it was sink or swim. This article is designed to be a lifeboat for you. Packed with food, water and a map, it will help you navigate the stormy seas to safe harbour. Back

in port, you can refit your boat and set sail again, in a bigger, better-equipped vessel.

What inexperienced trainers do

Believe it or not, it's relatively easy for both delegates and other trainers to identify a new or inexperienced trainer. That may sometimes be to do with nervousness or a lack of confidence, but those often stay on the inside and aren't visible. It is more likely to be the trainer's behaviours that give the game away. See if you recognise anyone in the following example.

New or inexperienced trainers tend to focus on getting through the task of training from the beginning to the end in a straight line and, in their rush to complete the training, they often forget that they are dealing with people. They stick closely, almost rigidly, to the agenda and they seem to feel they have to be in control of everything: timings, exercises and activities, delegates, interruptions and so on. Although they may appear confident on the outside, they either constantly worry about

what could go wrong, or are completely oblivious to it. They will panic if something unexpected or unscheduled happens, because they are unprepared for it – they have not rehearsed a contingency response, and are not yet flexible enough to be able to wing it a little. Their worst nightmare is a group of delegates who won't behave, particularly if this means that they go off at a tangent in the workshop and there is a danger that not all of the course materials can be covered in the allotted time.

There is nothing wrong with this caricature, and I expect that there are elements of it in us all. The behaviours I have described are only coping strategies. They are often exacerbated by a lack of organisational or departmental support, role models or a mentor. And, unless the new or inexperienced trainer consciously works to develop their skills and knowledge base, they will continue to train in this over-controlling, linear fashion and will subsequently find it difficult to make the transition to higher-level managerial and leadership training, coaching or facilitation.

Test yourself

On the following checklist, give yourself marks out of 10 for each competency, with 1 being low and 10 being high. If you score 7 or below, this indicates that there are still things that you need to do, to take you from training in a basic way to becoming an advanced trainer and, subsequently, a master trainer. Make a note of your scores and retest yourself in three months, to measure how much your confidence, capabilities and knowledge have grown.

	Description of thinking or behaviour	Score
1	I feel confident writing training objectives, agendas and key learning points.	
2	I fully understand our training administration processes and procedures.	
3	I always write, and use, checklists to help organise my training sessions.	
4	I feel confident writing trainer's notes that I can use.	
5	I feel confident writing standard training notes for other trainers to use.	
6	I have a trainer's toolbox that I always take with me when I'm training.	
7	I understand Honey and Mumford's Learning Styles to the extent that I can explain it to delegates and other trainers.	
8	I am familiar with MBTI, Johari's Window and Belbin's team roles, to the extent that I can recognise delegates' behaviour with reference to them.	
9	I make a conscious and deliberate effort to learn something new every time I train or attend a training session.	
10	I feel confident about straying slightly from the training format if delegates need to.	

Top Tip

- Make use of your checklists, and write short notes to yourself on them if you want to do something differently next time.
- Design your own checklists – what's important to you may not be on anyone else's list.
- Make sure that you understand the departmental or organisational training administration processes – that way, if there is a problem, you will be able to find out whereabouts in the system there has been a glitch, and rectify it so it doesn't happen again.
- Have a trainer's toolbox with pens, sticky tape, BluTack®, Post-it® Notes and so on, and always take it with you, so you are prepared if there is a shortage of essential resources.
- Always have a contingency plan. In case your PowerPoint® doesn't work, for example, have a plan for another approach, or be able to move bits of the workshop around until you can fix it.

Coming soon! Train the trainer – advanced

In the next article, we will explore what much more experienced trainers and facilitators do. (They train in loops, for example.) I shall explain how you can develop your skills so that you can work at board and director level and, for the advanced trainers amongst you, I shall identify derailers and give you some useful tips to increase your levels of professionalism.

Author

Fiona Beddoes-Jones is the managing director and principal consultant of The Cognitive Fitness Consultancy. The author of the psychometric instruments Thinking Styles®, Think Smart™ and Cognitive Team Roles™, she is a member of the British Psychological Society, the Association of Business Psychologists and the CIPD, and is also an NLP master practitioner. She runs in-house training workshops for trainers who want to become master trainers.
Telephone: 0044 1476 861010 • E-mail: fiona.bj@cognitivefitness.co.uk • Website: www.cognitivefitness.co.uk

What it's useful to know and remember

Always start with the agenda and the specific objectives of the workshop. You will have prepared these in advance, and they will match the information the delegates have been given. (Inexperienced trainers are forever fiddling with their training materials, to the extent that sometimes what's on the flipchart and what's in the training manual no longer match.) Have three to five key learning points built in to the session, and make it obvious, within the session, when you are focusing on each one. Always end by repeating the key learning points and rechecking the objectives, to make sure that the delegates know in what ways they have achieved each of them.

Familiarise yourself with Kolb's Learning Cycle and Honey and Mumford's four learning styles – activist, pragmatist, theorist and reflector. These will really help you to begin to understand the behaviours and learning preferences of your delegates so that you can make sure that you build something in for everyone. The Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), Belbin's team roles and the Johari Window are also useful models which – although not strictly necessary for trainers to know – will significantly increase your knowledge base and encourage you to develop the flexibility of your training approach.

Always keep your language positive. This is very important. Using negative language is a silly mistake that even experienced trainers and presenters often make. Your listeners need to hear what you want them to know, not what you *don't* want them to know. And if you tell them what you *don't* want them to do, they may very well do it. So don't tell them a whole lot of things *not* to think about, such as when the session will end, or when they will have their
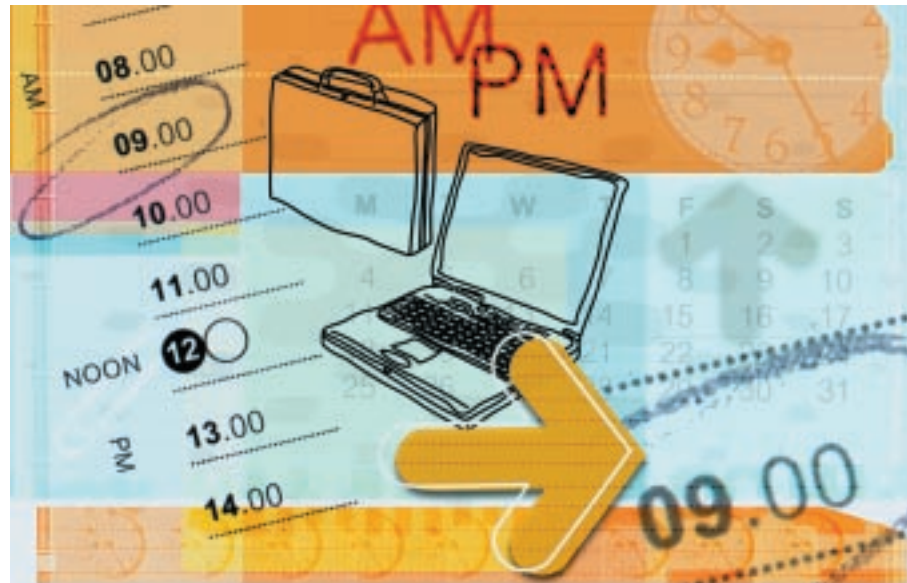
coffee break. Tell them to focus on the three key things you want them to think about at the time.

Make good use of trainer's notes. You can either write these yourself or customise someone else's. They will usually contain instructions and guidance on the structure and order of the workshop or session, suggested timings, information on the activities, when to put up each slide or flipchart if you are using them, the key learning points, likely questions and their answers, questions you can ask delegates, and other useful resources.

Be aware that it is much easier to deliver a session for which you have designed and written the materials than it is to take someone else's ideas and notes and deliver a session or workshop from those. That is because everyone thinks in a slightly different and unique way. Therefore,

what I might design as a logical structure to a session might not seem logical to anyone else. Many organisations have structured formats trainers are meant to design and deliver to. These can be useful for a new or inexperienced trainer, but are usually excruciating for experienced trainers, who will have developed their own style over the years. For them, having to work within these rigidly designed formats is rather like trying to stuff an inflated balloon into a bucket of water – somewhat difficult and ultimately messy.

Building your confidence

Using the Fenman *Train the Trainer* resources is an obvious way to increase your knowledge, which will go some way towards building your confidence as a trainer. More practice of the whole training cycle – in the form of Training Needs Analysis

(TNA), design, delivery and evaluation – is critical to your development as a well-rounded and flexible trainer. Rather like when you are flying a plane or driving a car, there really is no substitute for hands-on experience. Co-training, coaching and supporting other trainers will always provide opportunities to learn and grow.

There will be times when you have learned new knowledge – such as coming across Accelerated Learning (AL) Thinking Styles® or some of the Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) techniques when you have a crisis of confidence, and suddenly realising just how much more there is to learn. You may think, or feel, that you know nothing. This is not the case – you know, and have integrated, much more than you realise. However, with a vocation such as training, learning and development, there is always more to learn. Don't become despondent; instead, be excited about the new possibilities for

learning that have become apparent to you.

Make a conscious effort to learn something new every time you deliver or attend a training session. After all, it's much more comfortable to learn from someone else's mistakes than it is to make those mistakes yourself. Develop your own positive learning attitude and become a role model for your delegates and colleagues.

Give it time. Like any skill, becoming a great trainer doesn't happen overnight. Attitude and effort will always pay dividends in the end. So relax, you are in safe hands – your own.

Tip

Using acronyms is useful as they help you to remember things. Always set SMART objectives, for example – that is, objectives which are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic and **T**imebound. Make up your own codes if you find acronyms useful.

Basic training pitfalls to avoid: inexperience derailers

- Being too controlling of the agenda, timings and delegates' behaviour – they don't like it, and it is usually caused by a lack of confidence rather than the need to be controlling.

- Not moving things on, so that you run out of time and can't cover all of the material – delegates will feel short changed.

- Running the same course differently every time – delegates who attend the same workshop on different occasions often talk to each other. Completing the same exercise is reassuring and gives them a common experience to use as a basis for discussion.

- Not having a spare bulb, pen or flipchart, or not having a contingency plan for every eventuality.

Tip

The kind of sessions I have described, with their focus on clearly-defined objectives and key learning points, are pretty standard talk-and-chalk sessions. When you get into the area of facilitation, which is less prescriptive, and coaching, which is even more client led, then you will know you have stepped into the realms of advanced training. There the route is not linear, but winds through the mountains and valleys of your client's mind to discover the treasure that they are seeking, the pot of gold at the end of their particular rainbow.

Further information

You will find numerous articles within the *Train the Trainer* issues, and a range of material on Fenman's website.

Kolb's Learning Cycle
A basic text is: *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, David A. Kolb, Prentice Hall.

Honey and Mumford's learning styles
For details see www.peterhoney.com.

The Myers Briggs Type Indicator
Possibly the world's most-used indicator of adult personality patterns. A psychological test designed to assist a person in identifying their personality preferences. See www.aptinternational.org.

Belbin's team roles
Belbin defines a Team Role as 'Our tendency to behave, contribute and interrelate with others in a particular way.'
Team Roles at Work, Meredith R. Belbin, Butterworth-Heinemann. See also www.belbin.com.

Johari Window
A tool for illustrating and improving self-awareness and mutual understanding between individuals within a group, or to improve a group's relationship with other groups. Particularly used in the 'soft' skills, inter-group and interpersonal development areas. More information can be found at www.trainer.org.uk.

Training Needs Analysis
A comprehensive training needs analysis is the basis for designing a cost-effective management or skill development programme. See www.fenman.co.uk for a range of relevant texts.

Accelerated Learning Thinking Styles
Using Accelerated Learning Techniques, Liz Bourne, Fenman Training.
See: www.fenman.co.uk/catalogue/product/uald.htm.

Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) techniques
NLP provides a range of successful techniques for gaining rapport, identifying and clarifying outcomes, the alignment of values, and methods for overcoming barriers to success.