

Train the trainer – advanced



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Key learning points

- What *Train the trainer – advanced* is.
- What master trainers do.
- Developing your skills.
- Testing yourself.
- Advanced training pitfalls to avoid.

What Train the trainer – advanced is

This is the second in a series of two articles. Please see Issue 30, *Train the trainer – basic*, to fill in any gaps; in writing this, I am making the assumption that you will have read it. This article is written to give you some insight into what very experienced master trainers do, so you can develop your skills and knowledge further. It won't tell you everything, but it will unpick some of the mysteries regarding mastery of training and learning events. The Unconscious Competence Model (see Fig. 1) explains why, when you become really good at something, you

are no longer aware of your expertise, because, for you, it has become normal. This article will also explain to master trainers some areas of their own expertise, of which they may well be unaware.

What master trainers do

Master trainers not only focus on the agreed objectives of their learning events, they go beyond them. At the beginning of a session, they also specifically ask delegates what their objectives are. In guiding delegates gently but firmly, they are flexible enough to be able to build in those extra objectives, so that everyone receives what they want or need from the event (provided that individual objectives are both realistic and appropriate, of course).

Master trainers gently control timings without being controlling; they give delegates just the right amount of time – not so much that they move off track and start discussing something else, and not so little

that they have to rush the exercise. Master trainers understand that a lot of thinking can be done in a five-minute slot.

Probably the most noticeable thing about master trainers is their inherent flexibility. In some ways, they may sometimes be almost too flexible in that, because anything is possible, the primary focus of the learning event may become obscured. Master trainers are flexible about the order and sequence of the materials they cover in their sessions, and also flexible in other ways – such as the route they take to achieve the session outcomes and objectives. They are so adaptable that, in extreme cases, although the session outcomes will have been achieved, delegates may have become lost in the walk through the woods. That may lead to confusion and frustration on the part of delegates, who need clear signposting about exactly where they are with the materials and the learning objectives.

Advanced training pitfalls to avoid

- 1 Forgetting the basics, such as the agenda and outcomes, or reviewing your progress at the end of the session.
- 2 Trying to fit too much into the workshop and running out of time – it's frustrating for everyone, you included, as the training will feel unfinished and you won't be able to close the loops.
- 3 Being too confident and winging it – that may indicate a lack of preparation and attention to detail.
- 4 Being too flexible – just because you can change the direction or focus, or add something else into the session, that doesn't mean that it's always appropriate to do so.
- 5 Going off at a tangent without group agreement – you won't cover all of the workshop materials and some delegates will feel short-changed.

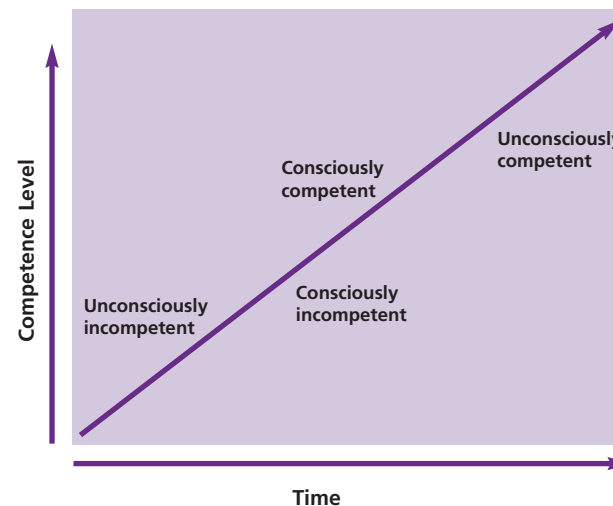


Fig. 1: The Unconscious Competence Model

Top tips

- 1 Stop fiddling with the training materials! Because master trainers are driven by always wanting to add value, and by not wanting to deliver the same training twice, they have a tendency to add to or change their session content and format continuously. Review, revise and update your materials periodically, but not constantly.
- 2 Make sure that your training objectives are stretching and ambitious, but not unrealistic. There is a danger that master trainers will try to achieve too much. They sometimes forget that, although they are very familiar with the training materials, their delegates are not. Trainers need to take their delegates with them and delegates' learning takes time. Even master trainers need to remember just how much effort and energy is expended when we are learning.
- 3 Master trainers make it all look easy. Unless you understand the underlying structure of what they are doing, you won't appreciate it. Remember to ask them why they have structured something in a particular way, so that they can explain their thinking to you. Note – if they are unconsciously competent, they may not know, so you might need to help them deconstruct their thinking and their reasons for adopting a particular strategy.

Further reading

- Fiona Beddoes-Jones, 'Train the trainer – basic', *Train the Trainer*, Issue 30.
 H. Hills, Feedback and FAME, *Train the Trainer*, Issue 35.
 J. Hay, Transactional analysis in the classroom, *Train the Trainer*, Issue 1.

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An implicit understanding of psychological concepts, and of people, relationships, group dynamics and how people think and learn, are further attributes of master trainers. They carefully consider how language influences the ways in which people think, learn and behave; and they focus on reinforcing delegates' learning using accelerated learning principles such as multi-modal repetition, multi-sensory inputs, multi-intelligences, the effects of reflection and the importance of physiology. If some of what I have just said doesn't mean anything to you, that's great – it gives you some clues to where you need to go to learn more and develop your knowledge base.

Master trainers train 'in loops'. They begin a strand of learning and return to it again and again, almost in circles, to add new connections and material to it, thereby reinforcing the learning. If you hear a trainer saying something like, 'and this brings us back to the point we covered earlier', or, 'which connects to X from this morning', then this trainer is training in loops.

These trainers create a safe place to be, so that everyone feels comfortable in the training/learning environment. A delegate's safety zone may relate to confidentiality, to the trainer's expertise in the subject area, or to the trainer's ability to handle anyone or anything that may occur in the session. Another behaviour you will notice in master trainers is that they are very likely to improvise. They can design/write off-the-cuff exercises if they need to, and can wing it if necessary.

If something unexpected or unscheduled happens within their session, master trainers don't panic. They are prepared for anything. They can deal with difficult and challenging people without feeling personally threatened; in fact, they



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will take personal responsibility for keeping difficult delegates under control, so that the other members of the group are not adversely affected. I was presenting at a conference a few years ago in which one delegate read her rather large *Times* newspaper right at the front of the room and then took a phone call on her mobile phone while I was speaking. I could see that the other delegates were horrified. I just laughed, after which they followed my lead and they all laughed too. Even though it was very irritating, it was also very funny, as the delegate in question really didn't have a clue about how awful her behaviour was, and the conference was on ... self-awareness!

That links us very nicely to the next point. Delegates are very much influenced by their trainer – for example, by their mood and energy levels – so if the trainer is calm, confident and relaxed, so too are the delegates. If the trainer panics or

allows themselves to be thrown off balance, the dynamics of the group will be badly affected. Having a master trainer as your lead trainer is very reassuring on an unconscious level for both delegates and the organisation – everyone needs to feel that they are in a safe pair of hands. (Did you notice the loop – the link with the previous paragraph?) Master trainers have a big toolbox and a vast suitcase of knowledge and experience to call upon: Thinking Styles, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI), the Johari Window and the Unconscious Competence Model, (see Figure 1) to name just a few. With these tools they are able to apply a variety of techniques as and when appropriate. That helps them to vary their training style and delivery mode from 'talk and chalk' to coach or facilitate, depending on the situation and the needs of the group. You will all be familiar with situational leadership (if not, you certainly need to be, if you want to be a master trainer), whereby a leader will adapt their style in order to lead effectively in a variety of different situations. Master trainers are situational trainers who adapt their training style to suit the needs of the group and the context.

To bring their training alive, master trainers build in stories and anecdotes taken from everyday experiences. For

example, I encountered a trainer the other day who was delivering an internal Train the Trainer programme, in which she stated that, in order to become good trainers, the delegates should be 'authentic'. So far, so good. To become authentic, she said, the trainers 'must' (this was given as an order, and she did not work for the army) listen to ten hours of her tapes between the two training sessions so that they could repeat her training 'word for word'. Hands up who shudders at this point and feels slightly sick. Well done – you are already on your way to becoming a more flexible trainer than she is! Unfortunately (both for her and the people she 'trains'), Ms X has completely missed the point and shown a fundamental misunderstanding, both of how people learn, and of how master trainers train. Great trainers are indeed authentic, but one of the ways in which they develop their authenticity is by using their own words; by taking what they learn and explaining it in ways that make sense to them. That enables them to be passionate about their materials as they can 'walk their talk'.

Developing your skills

Master trainers look outside their discipline to develop themselves. They don't focus exclusively on training and development, but extend their focus to areas such as business, leadership, education, psychology, Neuro Linguistic Programming and sports performance in order to explore what else they can learn that is relevant to how other people learn and grow. Becoming a master trainer takes time. Unless you are exposed to new experiences, new knowledge and other trainers, your development curve will take much longer to trace. You need to remember to study the structure of master trainers' sessions as well as the content.

Test yourself

On the checklist below, give yourself marks out of 10 for each competency, 1 being low and 10 high. Make a note of your scores, and retest yourself in three months to measure how much your training skills have developed. If you score between 4 and 7, this indicates that there are still things

that you need to do to take you on to becoming an advanced trainer and then subsequently to becoming a master trainer. If you score 8 or above, this indicates that you are already well on your way to being a master trainer; and if you score 9 or above then, not only are you already a master trainer, but you should perhaps be thinking about delivering master trainer workshops and master classes yourself.

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Description of thinking or behaviour	Score
1 I regularly train in loops and circles	
2 I always include stories, anecdotes and case-study examples in my training	
3 I feel completely confident and authentic in myself and the training I deliver	
4 Nothing shocks me in my training – I can handle just about anything	
5 I have a vast array of resources that I dip into as the need arises	
6 I will happily design and write a new task or exercise off the cuff while I am training, if the needs of the group suggest that it would be useful	
7 I feel confident enough to wing it if I need to, or to say that I don't know something	
8 I understand that everyone learns differently, and I structure my training so that everyone's individual needs are met without their even realising it	
9 I can quickly and easily change my training style; for example, if delegates are more expert than I am in a specific context, I will go into Facilitator mode	
10 I am familiar with psychological concepts such as Transactional Analysis and how they relate to training and learning	