

**Sharin' with Sharon —
You Came, You Saw, You Asked!
By: Sharon Bowman**

**For: Training Treasures Magazine
www.trainingtreasures.com**

DRAFT

You have questions — we have answers! Whether you're a novice, intermediate, or experienced trainer, you've probably encountered training situations that left you wondering, "How would an expert trainer handle this? What would they say about this in a train-the-trainer class?" Well, here's your chance to "ask-away!" We'll answer your questions, and if we don't know the answers, we'll make 'em up!

Seriously, we have done some asking of our own: We've invited an expert-in-the-field, topnotch trainer Sharon Bowman, to assist us in answering some of your most-frequently-asked questions. Not only does Sharon have over thirty years of training experience (she started when she was about five years old — well, maybe a little older), but she also thinks "out-of-the-box," so her answers may surprise you as she encourages you to step away from traditional solutions when tackling adult instructional challenges. Furthermore, the answers Sharon proposes are grounded in solid brain research about how the human brain learns best. In this column, you'll always find something new to experiment with in your own training programs. Who knows? One day you might discover that YOU are a "trainer's guru" as well, as you wisely answers questions posed to YOU!



The format of this column is simple: You ask by "sharin'" your question with Sharon. If you wish, let us know your name, title, company, and state you work in. Or you can simply sign your question with a moniker —Curious George, Sweating in Savannah, Training Terry, Getting-There-Soon, or something like that.

The first questions below have come from participants in Sharon's training programs all across the country. Later, as your emails flood in with questions (so start sending them!), we'll choose a few each month for Sharon to answer. To send a question or three, email us at: mailbox@trainingtreasures.com. Until we hear from you, here's Sharin' with Sharon!

SHARIN': Most of the time, when I ask a group of training participants a question, they either sit there in silence, staring at me, until I have to answer the question myself, or the

same person answers every time. How do I get more people to respond to my questions?
A Puzzled Trainer.

SHARON: An excellent question, Puzzled, and one that gets asked a lot. I'll give you three easy activities to experiment with — use one, or vary them whenever you ask a question. These strategies last one or two minutes, so you can insert them into your content without changing anything else.

1. **Three Before Me.** Ask a question (one with a number of “right” answers, not just one correct answer), and then say: *“We need three answers to this question from the group, and then I will add my answer to the mix.”* Wait at least five seconds — usually someone will respond before five seconds is over. If no one speaks up, say: *“I’ll go first and give you my answer, and then we need three more.”* You can also use Three Before Me when a participant asks YOU a question. You simply say: *“Let’s take three answers from the group before I give you my response.”* Accept all answers, then add your own. Of course, if there IS only one right answer to the question, you won’t use this strategy.
2. **Turn and Talk.** Ask a question, then say: *“Now take one minute and turn to someone seated near you and tell that person what your answer to the question might be.”* Pause at least thirty seconds to give them time to think, turn, and respond. Even better, move away from the front of the room, so now they have to change their focus of attention from you to the folks seated next to them. Then give them time to talk to each other. After about a minute has passed, and if you have extra time, ask for a few volunteers to state their *partners’* answers, not their own (people are usually more willing to state someone else’s answer). You can combine this strategy with the first by saying: *“See if you and your partner can come up with three answers to my question.”* Ask for a few volunteers to report out afterwards.
3. **Think It Then Ink It.** Ask a question, then say: *“Please write your answer to this question on an index card.”* Give them time to do that. Then say: *“Now exchange cards with someone near you. Let’s hear from two or three volunteers who will read the answers on the cards they hold.”* Accept all answers. Again, learners are far more willing to share someone else’s answers than stating their own.

SHARIN’: What do I do to get learners involved sooner? At the beginning of the training, after I cover the program agenda, administrative details, learning objectives, and such, I try to use an icebreaker to get folks loosened up, but many seem reluctant to take part in the activity and I feel like a fool. What to do? *Beginnings that Bomb.*

SHARON: What I’m going to suggest, Bomb, is that you dump everything you’ve been doing — at least for the first five minutes of your training program — and begin with a Fast Pass instead. A Fast Pass is a “connection” activity, *not* an icebreaker. Usually

icebreakers have little to do with the training topic or content. A connection activity, on the other hand, connects learners to each other *and* to the topic or content.

Furthermore, connections follow the Primacy Principle, from brain research, which states that people remember the beginnings and endings of experiences longer than the middles. So don't waste those first five precious training minutes with housekeeping details. Instead, grab your learners from the moment they walk into the room with an activity that is short, easy, content-related, and *memorable*. You can always cover the introductions and administrative details *after* the Fast Pass.



Here are two Fast Pass activities to choose from:

1. **Turn and Talk Revisited.** Use this strategy (described in the previous section) as a Fast Pass. Post the following instructions on a slide or chart paper, so that all learners can easily read the instructions when they walk in the room: *“After reading this, introduce yourself to a person seated next to you. Tell this person one fact you already know about the topic and one thing you want to learn from this training.”* Some learners will read and do the activity as soon as they enter the room. Others will wait until you officially begin the training. When that time comes, instead of beginning with welcomes or introductions, say: *“Please take a couple of minutes to read the slide and do the activity. If you have already done it, turn and do it again with someone else. Be ready to state what your partner said when the time is up.”* Then you step to the side or back of the room for about two minutes, while folks chat with each other. After the time has ended, you can either ask for a few volunteers to state what their partners shared, or you can now give your introductions and opening remarks.
2. **Standing Survey.** The posted instructions read: *“Stand and introduce yourself to three people who are at other tables. Make a list of at least three or more facts they already know about the topic. Be ready to share your survey list with the whole group when asked to do so.”* Ask learners to read the instructions and do the activity (you step to the side of the room, of course). At the end of about three minutes, ask for a few volunteers to read their lists. Thank everyone and welcome them to the training. Follow this with your own introductions and opening remarks.
