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IDEAS

That Will Make You a Better Teacher, Trainer, or Instructor



From: "The Ten-Minute Trainer" by Sharon Bowman, M.A. Website: www.Bowperson.com

LEARN HOW TO TEACH WHAT YOU KNOW.



Knowing something and then teaching it require two different skill sets. Learn how to teach what you know by: 1) studying how the brain REALLY learns; 2) watching effective instructors teach; 3) using a variety of brain-friendly instructional strategies that keep learners engaged; 4) and practicing new techniques every time you teach, train, or instruct others.

CLOSE ENOUGH IS OKAY.

"Approximation" comes before mastery – for you, as well as your learners. Your lesson or training plan doesn't have to be perfect. Neither you nor your learners have to be perfect. Step by step, you master what you teach and your learners master what they learn. Mistakes are a part of the process. It's okay to say "I don't know."



USE A VARIETY OF LEARNING STRATEGIES.



Create your own "Instructor's Toolbag" of learning strategies – activities that engage your learners throughout the class or training. Vary the strategies you use so that you maintain learners' interest and active participation. Remember: ANY activity (even fun ones) can become boring if repeated too many times.

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING.

Make activity instructions simple. Make them visually available to learners (handout, slide, wall chart) as you verbally explain them. Then ask "yes/no" questions about the instructions and have the whole class respond with "thumbs-up (yes) or thumbs-down (no)." You'll instantly be able to see if you need to repeat any of the activity instructions.



USE GROUP MANAGEMENT SIGNALS.



Teach learners a few simple group management signals so that you don't have to waste time getting the attention of the whole class during/after an activity. Group management signals can be: music, a raised hand, flicking the lights off/on, a repeated clap or other sound, or a "1 minute to finish" sign that you hold up. You can also use a time signal (forming a "T" with your hands) when you need to halt an individual or group conversation (learners can use this signal in their table groups too).

TAKE STRETCH BREAKS.

You need them and your learners DEFINITELY need them! Stretch breaks, while either sitting or standing, increase oxygen levels in the body and brain. Stretch breaks keep learners alert and make it easier for them to remember content. So pause about every 20-minutes of instruction and have everyone do a short, quick, easy stretch break with you.



TELL TOPIC-RELATED STORIES.



Everyone loves a good story! Humans learn best when a story is short, relevant, entertaining, and carries an emotional impact. Create or gather stories that are related to your topic and practice telling the stories to yourself (or in front of a mirror to use both voice and body) until you're comfortable switching into "story-mode." Remember to speak slowly and clearly, and use pauses to create suspense.

WALK AROUND.

"Proximity equals power." Wherever you stand in a classroom or training room, the learners in close proximity to you will pay more attention than those at the far end of the room. So teach from the sides or back of the room, as well as the front. And, whenever there is a table group activity, walk around and listen to the conversations – this also makes you available for questions from the groups or individuals.



NEVER SACRIFICE THE GROUP FOR THE INDIVIDUAL.



Once in awhile, an individual learner might take up a lot of class time by asking a multitude of questions, making lengthy comments, or recounting their own experiences. At some point, this becomes detrimental to the class as a whole. You can suggest to individuals who do this that they post their questions on a wall chart or that they continue their comments at break-time. Ultimately, the well-being of the class as a whole is in your hands. It is up to you to monitor and resolve group management issues.