
~ TRAINING SOLUTIONS ~

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A COLLECTION OF USEFUL TIPS FROM TRAINING PARTICIPANTS

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"A boring presenter makes for a boring presentation." ~ Montana Training Participant

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever wondered what training participants really want when they attend your workshop or class? Do you sometimes think about implementing particular training strategies and question whether or not it would be worth your effort? Do you often wonder if there were anything you could do to have a greater impact on practice? While not all of these questions can be answered in one newsletter, you may find this opportunity to hear directly from training participants very enlightening.

In the last two years, more than forty providers have been asked a simple question about their training experiences by trainers in Montana's Training Basics course: "If you were the trainer for a workshop, what is the one thing you would do?" Many of their answers included more than "one thing" which only serves to make the responses highly interesting and illuminating!

In this newsletter, a list of responses has been loosely organized by topic with minor edits. Organizing the responses has made it obvious that, as a group, these experienced training participants have pretty much covered every element of providing a positive learning experience. The list of topics reads like a checklist of suggestions or "tips" for trainers:

- Be Prepared
- Introduce the Topic
- Use Up-to-date Information
- Make It Relevant

- Incorporate Hands-on Activities
- Promote Group Interaction and Networking
- Use a Variety of Training Techniques
- Provide Examples
- Supply Handouts
- Foster Lifelong Learning
- Develop an Action Plan

While more passion or depth may have gone into some responses than others, certain training approaches emerged as quite important to this group of providers. While few of their training recommendations will sound like new information to most trainers, the power of hearing tips from training participants themselves cannot be underestimated.

"If I were a trainer, I would include: comfort for all personal needs including meeting room, introductions, ice-breakers, ask participants what they hope to learn, offer participants manipulatives (fidgets) during presentations, use an attention-getter, and a Q&A wrap-up." ~ MT Training Participant

BE PREPARED

It seems obvious that trainers should come prepared but these responses imply that providers have had experiences where trainers were not prepared. One person plainly said that the one thing she would do if

she were a trainer is "make sure she was prepared." Another responded that she would "be sure to adequately prepare materials to be ready." Yet another said she would "make sure she knew Power Point, and had handouts."

One provider described the "one thing" she would do in some detail saying that "if she were the trainer she would be sure to come prepared. She would always make sure there was enough materials, and she would include anyone who wanted to participate (make room for extras, etc). She would use her personality and sense of humor while speaking."

INTRODUCE THE TOPIC

One individual stated that she "felt an introduction to the topic was extremely important, so she would be sure to do that." Another said, "I would ask questions about what the people who are taking the class would like to learn about—specifically, detailed questions about the topic the class is on."

USE UP-TO-DATE INFORMATION

In this category, one person simply stated that she would "be sure her info is up-to-date." When asked what they would absolutely do as a presenter, a couple of other providers said they would "thoroughly research the topic, have a variety of visuals like Power Point, and include a question/answer period."

Another provider said that "she would make sure that she was very knowledgeable about the topic and would be able to understand and answer any questions that may come up." And finally, one provider focused on her preference that "the material be challenging and bring new perspectives on the topic, backed by research."

MAKE IT RELEVANT

While only one provider's response falls into this category, it certainly offers food for thought. "If I were a trainer," the provider said, "I would make sure my audience had information they could take with them and use right away. She admits that personally she was "not sure exactly how to do that, but as long

as they knew that it applied to them and that they could actually use it (and remember to use it), that is the one thing [she] would do."

INCORPORATE HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES

The importance of hands-on activities was mentioned multiple times, most often in connection with avoiding lecture. Speaking specifically of hands-on activities, the providers had a lot to say:

"I would be sure to not just lecture—to have some hands-on type exercises or activities. People get bored if all they have to do is sit and listen to someone else."

"I would maybe get training on providing more hands-on activities that could be used in the classroom."

"One thing I would be sure to do is to make the training as kinesthetic as possibly by having hands-on activities, visuals, and some type of exercise where the participants are able to get up and move around to different walkabouts."

"I'd engage the audience with hands-on activities, etc."

"I would make sure to do two things. First, I would use visual aids and make sure that there were handouts. Second, I would include "hands-on" activities in my training."

"I would try to make sure that the audience is involved and has, if possible, hands-on experiences in small group or whole group to share what they know about a subject. I would also give creative ways to synthesize learning, i.e., writing a mock grant, writing a plan of how to apply learning to their life/job. Or case studies where they read a scenario and as a result of what they learned, report back to group how they would handle this."

"If I were a trainer, I would make sure everyone is comfortable; offer hands-on to try new things; and have fidgets available."

I would "keep the audience involved in the learning."

PROMOTE GROUP INTERACTION

The importance of providing opportunities for group

interaction and networking among participants was emphasized in the following ways:

"Make sure everyone has a feeling for what different fields and experiences are within the audience. Have interaction among attendees."

"Try to make the training fun by incorporating games. Try to incorporate as much interaction as possible among the participants."

"Do introductions so that people get to know one another." For example, she liked a recent training when the presenter asked them to share why they went into the field. She liked hearing all the reasons that people had for working with children. She thought this could help people find a buddy in the room, i.e., someone who felt the same as them. She thought introductions were "a good idea because it can help people find an emotional connection to why they work so hard, attend trainings, etc."

"Make sure to include time for the providers to share their own experiences and information; networking is an essential piece to a provider's success."

"It is important for the participants to get to know each other, so starting with a game where everyone can get to know each other and learn about their own experiences is important."

Lastly, one provider commented that she had "done some training in the past and one thing she likes to include are introductions, that way everyone knows what kind of setting or experience everyone else has in the training session. Participants can also network with each other during breaks and after the training session."

USE A VARIETY OF TRAINING TECHNIQUES

While using a variety of training techniques may seem obvious, the providers were emphatic about their value. These responses seem to encourage trainers to mix it up and make more effort to meet the needs of different types of learners.

"Have a variety of training techniques."

"Use visuals like overheads or flip charts; I like to see what I am hearing."

"Use audio-visuals and visual aids, such as Power Point and flip charts; get audience participation by asking questions."

In conclusion, a provider said, "If I were a trainer, I would need to be familiar with my audience. I like to have some time for discussion and need to know the level they are at. I would make it very open and comfortable and not lecture. I would be sure to answer questions and open it up to a lot of discussion."

PROVIDE EXAMPLES

Even though only two providers explicitly mentioned using concrete examples, this idea was subtly reinforced by responses assigned to other categories. Along with using "pictures and other visuals," the first provider responded that "she would present before and after examples so that the difference would be more concrete." Along with providing "plenty of handouts," the second provider said that she would "use more time for providing examples for the participants to take with them."

SUPPLY HANDOUTS

Handouts have previously been mentioned in conjunction with several other categories, and their importance seems to be worth mentioning again. One provider said that the "one thing" she would do is to "make sure to have handouts." Two other providers said that "they liked trainings that were interactive, that had lots of visuals, and provided handouts."

FOSTER LIFELONG LEARNING

One provider explicitly chose as her "one thing" to "provide some way to encourage participants to further their education in the topic." Another provider put it this way, "I would make sure to have a list of resources that would give participants the option to research further should they choose to do so."

DEVELOP AN ACTION PLAN

And last but not least, one provider said that she

"valued time being provided for reflection and the development of a plan 'to use' the information provided" during the training session.

"Greet individuals as they enter the training and create a comfortable learning environment for everyone. Make sure to answer all questions that are asked to complete the training; ensure understanding from all participants. Create a learning environment that encompasses all learning styles, especially by using hands-on manipulatives and visual aids." ~ Summary of responses from three MT Training Participants

CONCLUSION

One provider's poignant response illustrates that providers generally understand that training takes considerable skill and ability. She said that "she would

not have the courage to be a presenter and that is why she takes training from others. If she had to do a training she would probably show a video or slide so it could do most of the work for her. She is afraid to speak in front of others and having technology would be the only way she would be able to do a workshop."

So the next time you wonder about the time and effort it takes to prepare and conduct a training session, think of these providers' words. They want training to be relevant to their individual interests and needs as well as to programs. They want to participate in meaningful learning activities that help them learn more about each other and about early childhood practice. They want visual aids and handouts. And they want what they learn to be up-to-date, interesting, and encourage lifelong learning. In short, they want everything already identified by the field as the elements of quality early childhood training. ~

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