

Training Brain Report : 1999

Research into how people learn reveals that there are many learning styles. This means that sticking to just one method of instruction - lecture and presentation - is not enough. Now, trainers who want to stay in business *have* to become facilitators.

Becoming a true facilitator means you need to get to grips with the ideas, tools and techniques of Accelerated Learning. You probably know some of the material involved in this approach and you may have already dismissed it as too childish or too lightweight. *If you have, we're going to ask you, through this article, to think again!*

Some of the information in this Report is the copyright (c) of Anne Thornley- Brown, President of the Training Oasis Inc. and used with permission. Visit her stunning Website at <http://www.thetrainingoasis.com> for further great ideas on Accelerated Learning.

How does Accelerated Learning work and why does it work?

- and what's in it for you as a trainer?

The reason why accelerated training specialists use approaches that are different from traditional training is not to just add fun and colour to sessions. It's to produce better

RESULTS. Using fun and colour is now known to measurably increase the ability to learn more, learn faster and learn more deeply. This means trainers can use accelerated learning to:

- cover more content in less time and with reduced frustration
- make it easier for delegates to digest content that is complex or theoretical
- make it easier for them to master skills by providing increased opportunity for practice
- increase retention by creating vivid and memorable learning experiences
- facilitate transfer of learning to the job by spending more time on application

The average adult attention span in the passive mode is about 20 minutes. After that, some attempt to stimulate the brain must be made or learners will find it difficult to maintain an optimal state for learning.

One of the limitations of relying on the lecture as the main method of instruction is that learners remain passive for extended periods. This provides the brain with little stimulation and makes it difficult for participants to maintain the heightened level of alertness that is required for learning.

Accelerated learning techniques simply give that necessary stimulation, keeping the delegate - and the trainer - alert, alive, invigorated and optimistic, throughout the whole training day!

This means that, as a trainer, you will know how to:

- remain fresh and enthusiastic even after delivering the same material dozens of times
- create a colourful and stimulating learning environment
- kick off sessions with entertaining, course-related ice-breakers
- transform technical material from mundane to magnificent
- keep participants and yourself alert and energised throughout the session
- use sure-fire strategies for sprucing up handouts and visuals
- add a multi-cultural flavour to sessions without preaching or lecturing

However, a creative training technique should never be an end in itself - never just for the fun of it. All of the important steps for delivering training with impact are essential. To be effective, all training sessions must start with the right ingredients - solid content that is well researched and tailored to meet the needs of the audience and the realities of the organisation. It should address clear and specific business needs. A business needs assessment to uncover the role that training plays in helping the organisation reach its goals is crucial. Management support must be elicited. The impact of training must be measurable. Skill gaps need to be uncovered and specific objectives set for the learners.

But to deliver effective training, solid content is not enough. The delivery

style is just as vital. To select the appropriate amount energisers etc. and the most effective ways to deliver content we must have a knowledge of how the brain and the senses work during the learning process and the impact of learning styles.

Once these ingredients are in place, then (and only then) it's time to add the fun, colour and pizzazz using tried and tested brain stimulants:

- adding colour to flipcharts, overheads and slides increases short term memory by 75% and long term memory by 25%
- Scent (imagine fresh-baked bread) has quicker, unfiltered access to the brain than any other sense. It raises attention and awareness levels dramatically.
- Music charges and energises the brain. Ever noticed how music with a fast beat can perk up even your most passive participants?
- Movement stimulates the flow of blood and oxygen to the brain. It also gives the body more sensory cues to trigger and facilitate recall. This means that we remember not only with the brain, but with the whole body.
- Touch stimulates the nerve endings near the skin surface that send messages to the brain. That is why providing stress balls, slinkies and Lego for participants to manipulate during the more passive sections of training work so well as energisers.

When it comes to the role of fun, laughter and the element of surprise in learning, it's amazing that so many

trainers still don't get it.

A Change in Approach for a changing world

Left brain and linear approaches to instruction (such as the lecture) have dominated the training and teaching professions for several centuries. For this reason, it's easy to forget that many of the instructional methods we now hold sacred were designed to address the needs of another era.

To meet the demands of a rapidly changing and increasingly competitive environment, companies need employees who will generate innovative, breakthrough solutions to business challenges. Rote learning and passive instructional methods such as lecture are not adequate tools for fostering innovation and out-of-the-box thinking.

We have an inquisitive, demanding and creative workforce which enlivens and drives our business. It's always been there, but somehow we haven't always realised this fantastic resource and we've often stifled it in the past.

The trainer within these environments - whether a specialist trainer or a manager - needs to be a leader in this new arena. Accelerated Learning isn't just for the training department. Its effectiveness can help you get more out of people where it counts... on the bottom line.

Thorough research and preparation were once the hallmarks of excellence in training. Today, trainers are required to deliver more

training with less time for design, preparation and delivery. Fast response to changing business needs and the ability to produce measurable, bottom line results are what's important now. By using Accelerated Learning techniques you can achieve all this, plus you will be able to:

- go home energised instead of exhausted at the end of a day of training
- 'spice up' your training on a limited budget and within tight time frames
- 'read' your audience and tailor your approach to meet their learning style
- warm up a conservative audience

Accelerated learning is not a theory, a methodology or a philosophy. Neither is it the result of one person's research. It's more to do with the recognition that because people have a wide range of learning styles, it's necessary to use a wider range of training styles than has so far been the case. (For instance, some people will learn to drive a car by just getting in and getting on with it, others will have to learn the Highway Code by heart before they'll go anywhere near the driving wheel). And thanks to the work of many investigators into human behaviour, there are now many effective techniques available to meet this need. That's all. It's as simple as that.

However, what this means is that the success of a training or coaching event is more dependent than ever on the ability of the trainer to juggle, apply, assess and change, to take

risks, be willing to deviate from the norm and make maximum use of the innovative methods being introduced. In other words, excellent facilitation skills.

People who attend training courses always have a subconscious check list of wants. All trainers will recognise this list! Delegates want:

- to be entertained
- to be shown how to apply the new learning to their actual job (what's in it for them)
- activity (but preferably NOT role play - or rather, role play as they remember it was a few years ago)
- to have a trainer who is good at the job
- to have fun
- not to have worked hard - or seem so
- a good environment - a nice lunch, sweets and treats
- a fast, lively pace
- a trainer that is enthusiastic and inspirational
- to be challenged, but NOT embarrassed

What they want is as the customer is a 'positive and memorable experience.' This means to go away not only feeling they have developed as a result of the training experience, but also feeling valued because their individual needs have been met.

Easier said than done!

To achieve all this, your ability to facilitate is vital. You must be able to:

- effectively question and listen

- watch the group dynamics
- involve everyone
- pace the knowledge parts
- flip chart and group the knowledge well
- not pick on individual delegates
- respond in a positive way even if a delegate has given a wrong answer
- handle resistance in a constructive manner

If you can't do all that, Accelerated Learning techniques will not be helpful and you will probably be challenged if you try. Don't give up by telling yourself that 'this stuff doesn't work anyway'.

As a trainer it is vital for you to be able to identify which areas of the course will be dry and tedious for the group, so that you can find a creative way to present the information, which will then lead to enhanced learning.

Try creating some fun and laughter. Some trainers dismiss games and energisers as time wasters or childish. Yet this is the best way to deliver complex information: far better than having delegates fall asleep through boredom or, worse still, reduced to tears because they feel so overwhelmed by the complexity!

As stated earlier, the average adult passive attention span is about 20 minutes. Taking a break every half hour would be disruptive. Instead, use a quick Brainteaser or Energiser, a short trivia quiz, or a course related puzzle.

Keep the introductions short and

then get everyone on their feet for a group exercise.

Technical or complex information can be introduced early in the day with a fun session when the subject matter can be more easily absorbed in a quick and efficient manner.

Have regular short breaks to re-fill coffee/tea cups and visit the ladies and gents. Let them know in advance that there will be regular breaks - this helps alleviate any first day anxieties.

Then be a good trainer and let them have the breaks!!

The time before lunch can be a seriously low energy time for delegates. Avoid videos here as this encourages the delegates to snooze, particularly if the lights are lowered. Keep the energy moving with a very active group exercise after the mid-morning break - skill practice would be good here; put sweets and treats out on tables, plus small 'toys' for them to play with e.g. Lego pieces, koosh balls, puzzles, tactile children's toys.

Have plenty of water available to drink. It's a vital ingredient in the success of your training - the brain is 70% water and regular re-hydration can help it function effectively.

The graveyard session after lunch is always a challenge, even for the most experienced accelerated learning trainer. Music can be used most effectively here, particularly lively dance music. If you are feeling brave and the group is particularly

cohesive, encourage them to dance. This will probably work with a young sales force, but you might get raised eyebrows from a group of older, more conservative executives.

Only you, as the trainer, will be able to judge the appropriateness of each exercise for each group. But do always ask yourself whether you are simply *assuming* it won't be appropriate.

Whatever, when the delegates come back after lunch, keep them moving for the first half hour, then have a short break with new cool drinks on the menu. Cold lemonade is good - or even ice lollies if the budget allows.

Put more toys out for the afternoon break. Try yo-yos and Frisbee. Most people can't resist having a go, remembering what it felt like as a child - which helps to utilise right-brain learning during the session.

If you have a conservative audience, one of the most risky approaches is to wade into AL without explanation. This type of group will appreciate time spent on explaining left/right brain theories and the use of the five senses in training. They will then realise that the trainer isn't just filling up the time between information sessions!

Maggie Taylor Murray
The Training Shop (UK) Ltd
enquiries@thetrainingshop.co.uk
www.thetrainingshop.co.uk