Teaching Toolkit

Principles of Adult Learning

Understanding of adult learning principles is critical to developing successful education programs that result in participant engagement and the facilitation of learning. In order to facilitate actions that result in learning among adults, it is critical to have a fundamental knowledge in key principles as well as as an understanding of how to implement them in the design of learning and training initiatives

Adults are autonomous and self-directed

Adults need to be free to direct their own learning. If the learning engagement is classroom-based, the facilitator must actively involve adult participants in the learning process. Specifically, they have to be sure to act as facilitators, guiding participants to their own knowledge rather than supplying them with all of the facts. They should allow the participants to assume responsibility for their learning and engage them in discussions, presentations and group-based tasks. If the learning engagement is an e-Learning course, the course should be designed to allow participants to explore topics in greater detail and choose from multiple learning activities.

Adults bring knowledge and experience to each learning activity

Over their lives, adults have accumulated a wealth of life experiences and knowledge. This may include family memories, work-related experiences and previous education. Linking new material in a course to learners' existing knowledge and experience creates a powerful and relevant learning experience. Relating theories and concepts to the participants and recognizing the value of experience in learning are two important factors to keep in mind as well.

Adults need learning to be relevant and practical

Every day, the human brain takes in hundreds of thousands of sensory inputs. As the brain processes these inputs, it begins to sort out information it deems relevant and important. Relevancy increases the likelihood information will be retained. Adults must see a reason for learning something and the learning must be applicable to their work or other responsibilities in order for it to be valuable for them. Therefore, learning engagements must identify objectives for adult participants before the course begins. By nature, most adults are practical about their learning. Typically, they will focus on the aspects of a program

Adults are goal-oriented

Adults primarily participate in learning programs to achieve a particular goal. Therefore, they appreciate an educational program that is organized and has clearly defined learning objectives. These need to be communicated early in the course.

Adults are problem-oriented and want to apply what they've learned

Adult learners want to be able to apply their learning to their work or personal life immediately. Using examples to help them see the connection between classroom theories and practical application; utilizing problem-solving activities as part of the learning experience; and creating action plans together with learners are important concepts that enable life application.

Adults are motivated by intrinsic and extrinsic factors

Learning is driven by participant motivation – the more motivated someone is to participate in training, the more he or she is likely to learn and retain information. Adults are motivated by both internal and external factors. During the first several weeks on the job, adults are highly motivated to learn. Similarly, motivation is high when they are faced with learning a new work process or approach to a problem. However, as they become more familiar with the content, learners' motivation to learn may wane until a specific need arises.

Adults are pressed for time

In today's fast-paced world, adults have to juggle demanding jobs, family responsibilities and community commitments. Even if they are highly motivated to learn, the pressures of life often limit the time many adults can invest in learning. Therefore, in many cases, learning must be available when it is convenient for the learner and delivered in "manageable chunks." These may come in the form of modularized e-Learning programs, podcasts, or webcasts or may be strategically delivered through informal training initiatives.

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Guidelines on How to Layout Materials for the Presentation

Before laying out a presentation, it is important to spend some time at the beginning focusing on several key questions.

- What is the purpose of the presentation?
- Why were you asked to give the presentation?
- Who is the audience?
- What does the audience expect?
- What important takeaways are you hoping for your audience?

These questions are like a foundation. The audience does not seek the mere transfer of information, rather they seek something more – they want to be inspired. A presentation should contain useful information and that information must be presented in a style that is memorable, exciting and grabs the audience attention. The presenter is seeking to transfer knowledge, create buy-in and create a sense of responsibility for the topic.

Think for a moment about a speech that might have inspired you. What was it that gave you that feeling? Was it merely the information presented, or was it the way that it was presented? For most of us it is the latter. The speaker made us see and feel the subject. Anyone can read information, but what an audience seeks is communication. And that requires more than speaking.

The answers to the questions above will likely form your learning objectives or outcomes. If the course objectives have been published, it is very important that these objectives are clear and that they are met. The audience will expect that from the beginning. Even the best presentation will fail to meet expectations if the objectives are not met.
There is a reason that you were asked to be a presenter. Maybe you were chosen because you are a subject matter

expert. Someone who was trapped in an excavation that caved in and survived to tell the story will have a greater impact than someone who is just reciting the rules and regulations. John Maxwell, a leading author and speaker, encourages leaders to make a connection with people. Presenters must do this as well. When you are asked to speak to a group of people, find a way to connect with them. As a speaker, you must touch the heart before you touch the head.

Knowing your audience is a key part of creating a good presentation. If the audience is mostly engineers and technical people, then the details of the presentation may need to contain more of the "how" than the "why" of the subject. On the other hand, a room full of managers and business owners will want to understand the value of the idea. What does this information provide them as a blueprint to increase company value? And if the room is full of shop workers, the message needs to focus on answering "why."

Another key consideration for laying out a presentation is having a good understanding of the location. First of all, is the presentation in a meeting room where tools such as PowerPoint can be used? Or, is the presentation outdoors? Are you speaking to a large group or just a few? If you are speaking to construction workers at a jobsite, a suit and tie is no more appropriate than wearing jeans and a T-shirt for a keynote speech at a business luncheon. Consider the time and location early in preparation for your presentation.
When the presentation is over, it is also important that the audience has a few "takeaways" from the time invested. What useful nugget can they implement immediately? What two or three items can they use in their job the following days or weeks to obtain an immediate return for the time invested? This is something that the presenter should consider from the very beginning.

Content

Without solid content your presentation will most surely fail. The presentation that is filled with tricks, gimmicks, style and pizzazz will fail without solid content. It is certain that you need the aforementioned "fun" for sure, but without solid content, you will fail.

It is important to avoid a "data dump" here. Cramming way too much information in one presentation will often fail at data connection. You have to make sure that the data you are going to convey is going to make a connection to your audience. So, know your audience. A "data dump" system often makes the presenter come off as a "know it all" and nobody likes that guy! Further, if you try to cram everything about a subject into a limited presentation you may actually come off as being somebody who doesn't really know your material but has made a laundry list of items and is afraid if you don't list everything, the audience will know you're not an expert. You don't have to be an expert.

Simplicity

Keeping your presentation simple can be challenging, but it will be appreciated by the audience. You may want to have a pre-ordained number of points that the audience should remember from the presentation. For example, think about the top three things you like your audience to remember as a starting point.

Outline your content. This is where the storyboard concept may come in. Have a clear structure. When this is over, will anyone ask, "So what? What's in it for me?" Your outline should be simple enough that if you were on an elevator for 30 seconds with someone, you can inspire them to attend with your outline. Ultimately, the presentation is a story. The flow should follow some type of pattern that has a purpose.

Storyboarding

One key concept that presenters use is called storyboarding. The storyboard is an intermediate step, not the beginning. Ideas are the beginning. A presentation without a storyboard is like taking a trip without a map or known destination. Having definite ideas and concepts or principles that you want to convey is necessary before starting your story. The storyboard should be used as a tool to refine your ideas. Tell a story, don't just talk.

Organize your story on a sheet of paper. Don't get too technical at first. Start with the big ideas you want to convey to the audience. For each idea, determine about how much time to devote and note this on the storyboard outline. Next, add time for the introduction, breakout sessions, interactive discussion time, etc. If the amount of time needed exceeds the allotted time, determine where to cut. Doing this up front enables you to pace the course so that all of the information is delivered in the amount of time provided.

Stories are great ways to communicate ideas and transfer feeling. If your story involves freezing cold temperatures, make the audience feel it. If someone slips on their coat, you have succeeded.

Get their attention at the beginning. Share an amazing fact, use an "eye-popping" picture or tell a story. Do something in the first three minutes to hook your audience. It is OK to go big and be bold, but remember your audience. Win them over with vision and inspiration. Appeal to their emotion. Connect with them and show them that this presentation is about them and what they are interested in. Early on, introduce the value proposition and continue refer back to this throughout the presentation.

Adults learn best by doing. Create an activity that requires their participation. For instance, if the class is studying time management, have each person sketch their typical weekly agenda. If your presentation is more than 20 or 30 minutes, it is important to consider having a group activity.

In your storyboard, highlight or circle your learning objectives. Keep referring to these to make sure you are delivering what you have promised. If the course objectives have not been published, change the learning objectives if absolutely necessary.

Once the storyboard contains the "big ideas" from your presentation, it is time to start filling in content. Think of this as a funneling process where the information goes from very broad to very specific. This should occur gradually. Using the amount of time available, think about what you are going to say. It is estimated that a person will typically speak 120-180 words per minute. That's enough information to fill up two or three paragraphs.

People are different and some talk faster than others. Use a normal pace for you. There is a time to speed up and a time to slow down. If you really want the audience to focus in on an idea, pause, or repeat the idea. Regardless, know how fast you speak and fill in your material accordingly. For instance, in golf, at 150 yards, I may choose a 3 wood and you may choose a 9 iron. What works for one person may not work for another.

Finally, once you have most of your thoughts laid out in a storyboard or an outline of some type, it is time to build the presentation. If a screen and projector are available, PowerPoint is useful in supporting ideas. It is also a helpful reminder to the presenter, acting like a cue card. Slides should be simple and convey brief thoughts. Images and video are great elements to have on the slides. Do not make the slides so complicated that they cannot be read or understood from a distance. If necessary, break ideas up into more than one slide.

Presentation skills for an effective course delivery

Engaging your audience is critical to your effectiveness as a speaker. Adult learners expect you to be prepared and to know your audience. In preparation for your course, make sure you ask and answer the following questions:

- Who will be attending? Where are they from? What position or experience do they hold?
- What are their hobbies?
- What is their family make-up?
- What are their goals?
- What are their strengths/weaknesses? What has been their good/bad experiences?
- What is the one thing they would want to get out of the course to make it a success?

Don't wait until the day of the course to determine how to connect with your audience; have a game plan. Based on the room layout and all of the answers above, here are some things to consider:

- Demonstrate respect by asking their opinions – and be open minded!
- Geography plays a significant role – understand different places do different things, pick up on the nuances
- Make your audience feel a part of the teaching team – they need ownership in the experience
- Treat them as an equal
- Exhibit energy and enthusiasm **and make it fun!**

It is vital that you understand the expectations of your audience. Try developing a questionnaire as part of the registration pack – this could be a powerful tool. Doing short phone call interviews with a few of the attendees can, also, be beneficial. The important thing is to learn the following information:

- What has been effective with them before
- Desired time frame and duration
- Desired level of detail

Here are a few course preparation tips to make the course more effective:

- **Make it relevant to your audience**
  (1) Case studies can be a great way to develop a solution to a problem. Remember different markets do things differently so be prepared to answer questions.
  (2) Help your audience connect their learning with their life experiences
  (3) Explain how the principles they are learning will apply to what they do
  (4) Tell stories based on real life experiences that your audience may have also had. A bad experience may be even more valuable than a success story. Showing your mistakes humanizes you and in hindsight shows you can laugh about it.
  (5) Make numbers relevant. Do not make them up! Ever watch the reality TV show Shark Tank? Faulty numbers catches the participants on Shark Tank every time.
  (6) Ask the class to summarize the main points of the presentation. That way you'll know they got it!

- **Make it personal**
  (1) Prepare anew for each group and revise your presentation based on previous classes. Your course should always be a work in progress.
  (2) Know the unique needs of the industry you are speaking to. Research your audience and your topic to make sure your information is still current. Google, ask attendees, ask the organizer of the group.
  (3) Use terminology that will be meaningful to your audience.
  (4) Present the information with a conversational in style. An adult learning course should be an interactive experience.

- **Active learning**
  (1) Active learning engages a greater range of students. If an individual topic is brought up that is irrelevant to the majority show respect to all and commit to addressing it after the formal class.
  (2) An active learning environment creates a bond between students. In truth, all business are built on relationships, competency and credibility. And those elements should all be present in your approach.
  (3) Teacher does no more than 50% of the talking and no more than 75% of the decision making in an active learning environment.
  (4) When to use active learning? Maybe your time constraints will not allow it because this type of learning generally takes longer. Consider pairing down your course to allow the time for active learning.

Structure

The overall structure of your presentation is another important component of an effective course. Goals for the course need to be expressed and mutually agreed upon. Set the theme and deliver it several times throughout the presentation. This will ensure that attendees get the point. A well-organized presentation should have an outline with a clear beginning, middle and an ending that wraps it all up. Consider providing the outline to the group and verbally opening and closing each segment. Check with your audience to be sure they are ready to move on. Your audience should be able to follow your train of thought without losing the basic message. Be careful not to give too much information or be too technical. It can overwhelm your attendees and lead to course failure. Be clear and concise. Less is better.

Now, you are ready to **PERFORM!** Your course is like a performance, so rehearse. Do dry runs with your staff. The bonus is they get an education as well. Time yourself. But most importantly, tape yourself. You will be amazed at what you will see – and seeing is believing. This is critical to fixing those idiosyncrasies that can really distract your audience.

Helpful Hints

Take advantage of all the tools available and appropriate for your audience. Here is a summary of tools that can be used to make your presentation very effective:

- **PowerPoint:** the following tips should make your PowerPoint presentation effective
  (1) Do not read your slides to the audience – better yet eliminate prose form ALL slides
  (2) The slide supports the lecture…not the reverse
  (3) Use as a prompt not as a crutch
  (4) Keep slides in sync with what you're saying

(5) Keep it simple
    - Avoid a busy background template
    - Stick with simple fonts
    - Pictures must make sense to the participants
(6) No more than one hour straight: a rule of thumb is one minute per slide
(7) Mix it up: Embed audio and/or video
(8) Determine if you will be using a remote and run the presentation yourself if possible. Helpers can be distracting
(9) Stand to the left of the screen because people read left to right
(10) Don't hand out copies of your presentation or anything else ahead of time. Your audience will read ahead and pay less attention to what you're saying.

- **Flip charts/ white boards**
  (1) Print large and legible
  (2) Great tool to use as a parking lot. Use the flip chart to write down those ideas that may be less relevant to the entire group but are worthy of further discussion.

- **Props**
  (1) Seeing is believing, so add useful props to the discussion if possible
  (2) Must be relevant to the subject

- **Demonstrations**
  (1) Make sure you practice ahead of time…it needs to look easy
  (2) Ask for audience participation only if it is easy

- **Role playing**
  (1) Promotes active participation
  (2) Coaching sessions

- **Breakout sessions**
  (1) Promotes networking among the group
  (2) Brings the subject to life with a real working example

Day of the Performance

Arrive early and get comfortable and familiar with the space. Set up the room first and include space for 10% more than the expected attendance. Take the time to sit in different chairs around the room to ensure that everyone can see the screen. Test the technology! You don't want any surprises when you go live! Play music in the room to get the energy level high. Remember, this is a performance, so greet everyone as they enter the room.

The timing of your presentation is important to the performance. Start promptly on time. Announce when you will be breaking and do so on time. Make sure you have a clock visible or ask for a timekeeper to keep you on track. Speaking of on track, don't get derailed. Use the parking lot method (a flip chart/ white board to write information on)

for questions that are not relevant to the group. Offer to stay after class to answer questions. Plan to end five minutes early. This creates a buffer so you are not rushing at the end. Keeping good time shows respect for the time of your audience. Make sure you end on a high note. Remember this is a performance!

In any performance, you want to work the room. Here are some tips:

(1) Greet people as they walk in, shake hands and exchange business cards
(2) Speak up so you maintain attentions and control
(3) Use body language to emphasize main points
(4) Maintain eye contact
(5) Constantly gauge the audiences response to your presentation
(6) Ask questions of specific students calling them by name. This keeps everyone alert

Think of yourself as a facilitator, not a lecturer. You are capable of eliciting/generating audience participation. The best way is with tangible takeaway and goals. Consider the following when developing your handouts:

(1) Provide support for the subject
(2) Provide additional information on the subject
(3) Examples
    - White paper
    - Article
    - List of reference materials
    - Notes taking sheet

If your presentation is streaming live or is being recorded for replay as a webcast or in a similar manner, here are a few additional suggestions:

(1) Speak with a strong, clear voice
(2) Use more slides/visuals
    - 2-3 slides per minute with a single idea per slide
    - More graphics, maybe one word or phrase

How to Deal with the Unexpected

It happens to everyone, so since you can't prevent it, manage for it. Here are some examples of the unexpected and suggestions for managing the crisis:

(1) Stage fright. Even experienced speakers struggle with this, so understand that it is natural.
    - Be prepared
    - Practice makes perfect
    - Remember your audience has been there before, so come clean and admit it

(2) Your technology doesn't work. This is the biggest fear of many so it's good to have a back-up plan.
    - Arrive early and run through your presentation. This will help minimize the unexpected.
    - Ask for help. There may be a technology guru in the audience.
    - Give yourself a time limit. For example, if after 10 minutes, you can't get the PowerPoint to work, then give up on it and continue the presentation from your notes. Make sure you have a printed PowerPoint just in case.

- Don't over apologize.
- Don't get worked up.
- Move on as if it is no big deal. Your audience will not make a big deal about it if you don't.

(3) The content is not appropriate for the audience

- Knowing your audience beforehand eliminates this risk.
- If you realize that the information is too basic for your audience, ask for their input and turn it into more of a discussion group.
- If your material is too advanced:
  - (a) Try to remember when you weren't the subject expert and what confused you
  - (b) Be honest with them
  - (c) Ask questions
  - (d) Drop the PowerPoint and make it an informal question and answer session