**Lecture 9**

**The Most Effective Training Techniques**

There are numerous methods and materials with the most effective training techniques available to help you prepare and equip employees to better do their jobs. Indeed, with so many choices out there, it can be daunting to determine which methods to use and when to use them.

And using several methods for each training session may actually be the most effective way to help employees learn and retain information. In this article, we take a close look at each of the myriad techniques, and examine their advantages and disadvantages. We also explain how you can combine the various methods into an effective blended learning approach.

**Overall Considerations**

Before considering specific training techniques, ask yourself these questions:

* What are your training goals for this session?
  + New skills
  + New techniques for old skills
  + Better workplace behavior
  + A safer workplace
  + A fair and equal workplace free of discrimination and harassment
* Who is being trained?
  + New employees
  + Seasoned employees
  + Upper management
* What is your training budget?
* How much time has been allocated for training within your organization?
* What training resources and materials do you have at your disposal?

Your answers to these questions begin the narrowing process for your training choices. Now let’s examine those training methods, their pros and cons, and where they best fit in a training program.

**The Choices**

Even with the many technological advances in the training industry, traditional formats remain viable and effective.

**Classroom or Instructor-Led Training**

Instructor-led training remains one of the most popular training techniques for trainers. There are many types including:

* Blackboard or whiteboard. This may be the most “old-fashioned” method, but it can still be effective, especially if you invite trainees to write on the board or ask for feedback that you write on the board.
* Overhead projector. This method is increasingly being replaced with PowerPoint presentations, which are less manually demanding, but overheads do allow you to write on them and customize presentations easily on the spot.
* Video portion. Lectures can be broken up with video portions that explain sections of the training topic or that present case studies for discussion.
* PowerPoint® presentation. Presentation software is used to create customized group training sessions that are led by an instructor. Training materials are provided on CDROM and displayed on a large screen for any number of trainees. Employees can also use the programs individually, which allows for easy make-up sessions for employees who miss the group session. This method is one of the most popular lecture methods and can be combined with handouts and other interactive methods. [See page 37 for PowerPoint presentation tips.]
* Storytelling. Stories can be used as examples of right and wrong ways to perform skills with the outcome of each way described. This method is most effective with debriefing questions, such as:
  + How does this story relate to training?
  + How did the main character’s choices make you feel?
  + What assumptions did you make throughout the story? Were they correct?
  + What would you have done differently?

This technique makes communication easier since it is nonthreatening with no one right answer. It is cost effective, especially if trainers have their own stories to tell. Stories can also make sessions more personal if they involve people trainees know. You can also find many training stories online.

Advantages

* Instructor-led classroom training is an efficient method for presenting a large body of material to large or small groups of employees.
* It is a personal, face-to-face type of training as opposed to computer-based training and other methods we will discuss later.
* It ensures that everyone gets the same information at the same time.
* t is cost-effective, especially when not outsourced to guest speakers.
* Storytelling grabs people’s attention.

Disadvantages

* Sometimes it is not interactive.
* Too much of the success of the training depends on the effectiveness of the lecturer.
* Scheduling classroom sessions for large numbers of trainees can be difficult—especially when trainees are at multiple locations.

You can use lectures effectively by making sure your audience is engaged throughout the session. Here are several ways to achieve this:

* Train your trainers in the art and science of public speaking.
* Give your trainers the materials they need.
* Use with interactive methods.

**Interactive Methods**

There are many ways that you can break up training sessions and keep trainees attentive and involved, including:

* **Quizzes.** For long, complicated training, stop periodically to administer brief quizzes on information presented to that point. You can also begin sessions with a prequiz and let participants know there will also be a follow-up quiz. Trainees will stay engaged in order to improve their prequiz scores on the final quiz. Further motivate participants by offering awards to the highest scorers or the most improved scores.
* **Small group discussions.** Break the participants down into small groups and give them case studies or work situations to discuss or solve. This is a good way for knowledgeable veteran employees to pass on their experience to newer employees.
* **Case studies.** Adults tend to bring a problem-oriented way of thinking to workplace training. Case studies are an excellent way to capitalize on this type of adult learning. By analyzing real job-related situations, employees can learn how to handle similar situations. They can also see how various elements of a job work together to create problems as well as solutions.
* **Active summaries.** Create small groups and have them choose a leader. Ask them to summarize the lecture’s major points and have each team leader present the summaries to the class. Read aloud a prewritten summary and compare this with participants’ impressions.
* **Q & A sessions.** Informal question-and-answer sessions are most effective with small groups and for updating skills rather than teaching new skills. For example, some changes in departmental procedure might easily be handled by a short explanation by the supervisor, followed by a question-and-answer period and a discussion period.
* **Question cards.** During the lecture, ask participants to write questions on the subject matter. Collect them and conduct a quiz/review session.
* **Role-playing.** By assuming roles and acting out situations that might occur in the workplace, employees learn how to handle various situations before they face them on the job. Role-playing is an excellent training technique for many interpersonal skills, such as customer service, interviewing, and supervising.
* **Participant control.** Create a subject menu of what will be covered. Ask participants to review it and pick items they want to know more about. Call on a participant to identify his or her choice. Cover that topic and move on to the next participant.
* **Demonstrations.** Whenever possible, bring tools or equipment that are part of the training topic and demonstrate the steps being taught or the processes being adopted.
* Other activities.
  + Create a personal action plan
  + Raise arguments to issues in the lecture
  + Paraphrase important or complex points in the lecture

Advantages

* Interactive sessions keep trainees engaged in the training, which makes them more receptive to the new information.
* They make training more fun and enjoyable.
* They provide ways for veteran employees to pass on knowledge and experience to newer employees.
* They can provide in-session feedback to trainers on how well trainees are learning.

Disadvantages

* Interactive sessions can take longer because activities, such as taking quizzes or breaking into small groups, are time-consuming.
* Some methods, such as participant control, can be less structured, and trainers will need to make sure that all necessary information is covered.

**Hands-On Training**

Experiential, or hands-on, training, offers several more effective techniques for teaching employees, including:

* **Cross-training.** This method allows employees to experience other jobs, which not only enhances employee skills but also gives companies the benefit of having employees who can perform more than one job. Cross-training also gives employees a better appreciation of what co-workers do and how their own jobs fit in with the work of others to achieve company goals.
* **Demonstrations.** Demonstrations are attention-grabbers. They are an excellent way to teach employees to use new equipment or to teach the steps in a new process. They are also effective in teaching safety skills. Combined with the opportunity for questions and answers, this is a powerful, engaging form of training.
* **Coaching.** The goal of job coaching is to improve an employee’s performance. Coaching focuses on the individual needs of an employee and is generally less formal than other kinds of training. There are usually no set training sessions. A manager, supervisor, or veteran employee serves as the coach. He or she gets together with the employee being coached when time allows and works with this employee to:
  + Answer questions
  + Suggest more effective strategies
  + Correct errors
  + Guide toward goals
  + Give support and encouragement
  + Provide knowledgeable feedback
* **Apprenticeships.** Apprenticeships give employers the opportunity to shape inexperienced workers to fit existing and future jobs. These programs give young workers the opportunity to learn a trade or profession and earn a modest income. Apprenticeship combines supervised training on the job with classroom instruction in a formal, structured program that can last for a year or more.
* **Drills.** Drilling is a good way for employees to practice skills. Evacuation drills are effective when training emergency preparedness, for example.

Advantages

* Hands-on training methods are effective for training in new procedures and new equipment.
* They are immediately applicable to trainees’ jobs.
* They allow trainers to immediately determine whether a trainee has learned the new skill or procedure.

Disadvantages

* They are not good for large groups if you do not have enough equipment or machines for everyone to use.
* Personal coaching can be disruptive to the coach’s productivity.
* Apprenticeship can be expensive for companies paying for employees who are being trained on the job and are not yet as productive as regular employees.

**Computer-Based Training (CBT)**

Computer-based training is becoming increasingly prevalent as technology becomes more widespread and easy to use. Though traditional forms of training are not likely to be replaced completely by technological solutions, they will most likely be enhanced by them. Human interaction will always remain a key component of workplace training.

Nonetheless, it is a good idea to look more closely at what training technologies have to offer and how they might be used to supplement existing training programs or used when developing new ones. Computer-based training formats vary from the simplest text-only programs to highly sophisticated multimedia programs to virtual reality. Consider the following types:

* **Text-only.** The simplest computer-based training programs offer self-paced training in a text-only format. These programs are similar to print-based, individualized training modules with the addition, in most cases, of interactive features. While simple in format, these programs can be highly effective and present complicated information and concepts in a comprehensible and easily accessible way.
* **CD-ROM.** A wide variety of off-the-shelf training programs covering a broad range of workplace topics are available on CD-ROM. Programs can also be created by training consultants for the specific needs of the particular organization or individual departments.
* **Multimedia.** These training materials are an advanced form of computer-based training. They are much more sophisticated than the original text-only programs. In addition to text, they provide stimulating graphics, audio, animation, and/or video. Multimedia tends to be more provocative and challenging and, therefore, more stimulating to the adult mind. Although costs are higher than text-only software, the benefits in terms of employee learning may well be worth it. Multimedia training materials are typically found in DVD format.
* **Virtual reality.** Virtual reality is three-dimensional and interactive, immersing the trainee in a learning experience. Most virtual reality training programs take the form of simulation, which is a highly effective form of training. It is hands-on experience without the risks of actual performance. Flight simulators, for example, have been used successfully for years to train airline and military pilots in critical flying skills, as well as to prepare them for emergency situations in a safe and forgiving environment.

Advantages

* Computer-based training programs are easy to use.
* They can often be customized or custom designed.
* They are good for helping employees develop and practice new skills.
* They are useful for refresher training. They are applicable to self-directed learning.
* They can be cost-effective because the same equipment and program can be used by large numbers of employees.
* They are flexible because trainees can learn at their own pace and at a time that’s convenient for them. Computer-based programs are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. No matter which shift an employee works, training is always available.
* Some programs are interactive, requiring trainees to answer questions, make choices, and experience the consequences of those choices. This interaction generally results in greater comprehension and retention.
* They are uniform, which makes it possible to standardize training.
* They are measurable. When computers are used for training, it is possible to track what each employee has learned right on the computer. Most programs have post-tests to determine whether the employee has understood the training. Test scores give trainers statistics for training evaluations.

Disadvantages

* These programs require trainees to be computer literate.
* They require trainees to have computer access.
* There is little or no interaction with a trainer; if trainees have questions, there’s no one to ask.
* These programs are not effective at teaching “soft-skills,” such as customer service, sales, or sensitivity training.
* They are not the best choice for new or one-time training. Trainers need live interaction to ensure new skills or concepts are being communicated. Trainees need to be able to ask questions and receive feedback.
* Some poorly designed programs are “boring” and result in trainees having a poor retention rate of the material as well as a low finish rate.

**Online or E-Learning**

In addition to computer-based training, many companies with employees in a variety of locations across the country are relying on other technologies to deliver training. According to the ASTD “State of the Industry” report, companies are using a record level of e-learning, and ASTD predicts that number will continue to rise. This method is becoming more and more popular as access to the Web becomes more widely available. Some examples include:

* **Web-based training.** This method puts computer-based training modules onto the Web, which companies can then make available to their employees either on the company’s intranet or on a section of the vendor’s website that is set up for your company. There are many courses available on the Internet in many different topic areas. These courses provide a hands-on, interactive way for employees to work through training presentations that are similar to CD-ROM or PowerPoint, on their own. Training materials are standardized because all trainees will use the same program. Materials are also easy to update, so your training is always in step with your industry. Web-based training programs are also often linked with software (a learning management system, or LMS) that makes trainees’ progress trackable, which makes recordkeeping very easy for the training administrator.
* **Tele- or videoconferencing.** These methods allow the trainer to be in one location and trainees to be scattered in several locations. Participants are networked into the central location and can usually ask questions of the trainer via the telephone or by a webchat feature. Lectures and demonstrations can be effective using this method.
* **Audioconferencing.** This method is similar to videoconferencing but involves audio only. Participants dial in at the scheduled meeting time and hear speakers present their training. Question and answer sessions are frequently held at the end of sessions in which participants can email questions or call in and talk to a presenter.
* **Web meetings, or webinars.** This method contains audio and visual components. Participants dial in to receive live audio training and also follow visual material that appears on their computer screens. These presentations are similar to CD-ROM or PowerPoint presentations and sometimes offer minimal online interactivity. Q & A sessions may also be held at the end of sessions.
* **Online colleges and universities.** This method is also known as distance learning, and many schools now offer certificates or degrees through online programs that require only minimal on-campus residency.
* **Collaborative document preparation.** This method requires participants to be linked on the same network. It can be used with coaches and trainees to teach writing reports and technical documents.
* **E-mail.** You can use e-mail to promote or enhance training. Send reminders for upcoming training. Solicit follow-up questions for trainers and/or managers. Conduct training evaluations through e-mail forms.

Advantages

* Online or e-learning programs are effective for training across multiple locations.
* They save the company money on travel expenses.
* They can be a less expensive way to get training from expert industry professionals and consultants from outside the company.
* They are useful for refresher training.
* They are good for self-directed learning.
* They can be easy to update with new company policies or procedures, federal regulations, and compliance issues.
* They offer trainers a growing array of choices for matching training programs to employee knowledge and skill levels.

Disadvantages

* These programs require trainees to be computer literate.
* They are usually generic and not customized to your company’s needs.
* Some employees may not like the impersonal nature of this training.
* Employees may be too intimidated by the technology or the remoteness of the trainer to ask questions.
* Lack of computer terminals or insufficient online time may restrict or preclude access to training.
* Inadequate or outdated hardware devices (e.g., sound cards, graphics accelerators, and local area networks) can cause programs to malfunction.
* Your company’s Internet servers may not have enough bandwidth to receive the materials.
* Self-instruction offers limited opportunities to receive context-specific expert advice or timely response to questions

**How to Use a Blended Learning Approach**

Blended learning is a commonsense concept that results in great learning success. The blended learning approach is simply acknowledging that one size doesn’t fit all when it comes to training. In a nutshell, blended learning means using more than one training method to train on one subject. Here are several good reasons to use a blended learning approach:

* A University of Tennessee study showed that a blended learning program reduced both the time and the cost of training by more than 50 percent.
* The same study showed a 10 percent improved result in learning outcomes compared with traditional training.
* Learning experts believe that a big advantage of blended learning is that it more closely replicates how people actually learn on the job, through experience and interaction with co-workers.

This approach works well because the variety of approaches keeps trainers and trainees engaged in training. Blended learning simply makes a lot of sense. Consider the many factors that affect training:

* Subject matter
* Audience make-up
* Types of learners
* Budget considerations
* Space constraints
* Compliance issues

Any or all of these considerations affect your choices for training and may even necessitate that you use a blended learning approach. Chances are you already use this method perhaps without even realizing it. Have you ever:

* Used a PowerPoint training session and incorporated written quizzes, small group discussions, and role plays at various points in the training?
* Broken a complex subject into parts and used a different training method to teach each section or step?
* Used a live trainer with hands-on demonstrations for initial training and a CD-ROM or online course for refresher training?

If you have done any of the above methods, you are already using a blended learning approach. Here’s how to plan a blended learning training program.

Once you’ve identified training needs, answer these questions about each situation:

* What are the training conditions?
* Do you have a classroom? How many people will it hold?
* How many computers do you have access to?
* What resources are available?
* What are the characteristics of the training content? Is it soft or hard?
* Who is your target audience?
* What are its demographics?
* How many languages do you need to accommodate? Which ones?
* How many employees need this training?
* How quickly do you need to accomplish this training?

Your answers will direct you to the optimal delivery method. However time consuming this process may seem, blended learning offers trainees a well-planned session that is custom-designed for them, the subject, and the learning environment. In the long run, blended learning saves time and money since this training process is an efficient use of resources to help employees develop sufficient levels of knowledge retention.