

Designing quickly for
today's adult learners

TRAINERS

In today's business world we find ourselves having to do more with less – everyone at every level in every organisation is in the same boat. This short session is designed to respond to just that pressure and help you design training events more speedily and more effectively – allowing you to do more with what you have without heaping on the pressure.

Let's go back to some guiding principles of adult learning today. Many people still use the traditional linear structure of lesson plans to guide their design. In today's fast moving world this, sadly, just doesn't take into account the principles of learning:

1. **Learning is best when created not consumed** – this means that design must be focused on the learners and not on the trainer's comfort or their notes. Its about creating encounters and possibilities for learners to make sense of new learning and integrate it into their own world.
2. **Learning should be activity based not material based** – much of the effort of traditional design goes into the creation of learning material e.g. PowerPoint & workbooks. Yet learners learn best when they learn through whole body experiences; in context and in conversation.
3. **The brain is a multi processor and therefore needs constant stimulus from many different angles throughout the training** - If designing in a traditional, verbal, reasoning way, you write down all the permutations of a possible source of learning and that leaves no scope for intuitive responses that may make the difference between connection or not for the learner. Designing should allow room for exploration and discovery – just as much for the trainer as for the learner!

But most of all, the traditional route to training design is overly time consuming – time that we simply do not have. Also if we have invested a lot of time and energy into something we are loath to update – how quickly today do things become obsolete? Almost overnight!

We need to adopt a process that allows for constant evolution; and that means designing in a much more fluid, free manner – allowing scope for constant improvement.

If you are still using training courses written a year ago let alone 5 or 10, then these need to be

updated **now** or you are letting your learners down – the world in which we live is moving too fast for you to be using out of date materials.

Designing the Leaps & Bounds way

These steps were originally taken from David Meier's rapid design principles and adapted to suit the way we do things:

1. Establish outcomes
2. Decide on a theme that will carry the content e.g. opening up new approach – a journey or if you want to encourage a depth of thinking a detective theme etc.
3. Chunk up and make connections
4. Plan the presentation and practice stage
5. Plan the preparation
6. Plan the performance and evaluation
7. Sequence the learning
8. Deliver the learning
9. Evaluate and enhance

Let's look at each step in a little more detail. To do this practically, take a piece of training you want to update and give yourself an hour to work through these steps and see how far you get.

Step 1 - Establish outcomes

What do you want learners to be able to do at the end of the learning? Think beyond the surface. If you have a customer service course to write, don't limit yourself just to service issues. Maybe you want to use this as an opportunity to enhance teamwork or encourage problem solving. If so jot this down too as an outcome. You can use both the **content** and the **process** to achieve the outcomes you seek. By focusing time here you will ensure that whatever you deliver exceeds your client's expectations

Step 2 - Decide on a theme

We use the theme to act as a creative device that allows us to 'brain dump' ideas. We may remove the theme later, it simply acts as a conduit for ideas. At this stage just brainstorm – don't evaluate. Use the theme to allow free exploration for what you could cover (more on themes in the next issue)

Step 3 - Chunk Up

Having used the theme to brainstorm ideas, now make connections between ideas so that you start to see patterns in your information and can start to build a 'story' of how the content will flow.

Step 4 - Plan the presentation and practice stage

Decide the most learner centred ways of enabling the learners to encounter the new information and integrating the information into their own world.

Remember to:

- Appeal to all learning styles and senses
- Make learning activity based and create a supportive learning co-operative
- Alternate between physically active and physically passive activities
- Ensure that the learners are doing most of the learning rather than you telling – at least a 70/30 split
- Create a flexible design that allows scope for adapting delivery to different learning groups

5. Plan the preparation

How can you get your learners ready and interested before they even arrive in the room? The more you can achieve up front the easier the transition into training and then back to work as learning is then recognised as a part of “the way things are done around here”.

6. Plan the performance and evaluation

How can you best support the transition of learning into the day-to-day work so it becomes natural? You know exactly what you want them to be able to do (through defining your outputs) so, knowing your business as you do, what is the best way to make this happen? And how will you know when it has happened?

7. Sequence the learning

Do a run through in your head and on paper – How does it flow?

Have you applied all the principles listed above?

If you were on the event, what would you think and feel towards it?

Put yourself in the audience’s shoes, what will they think and feel?

Use this stage as another opportunity for stretch – is there any way you can prepare them a little bit better? Is there any way they can be more involved? Etc.

And there you have it! Use the next two projects on your list to continuously improve. Remember that the facilitator’s role is to initiate the learning and then to get out of the way! You are not there to perform in front of the learners – you should use your expertise to ask the right questions and provide a real life context. Enjoy this experience, in the same way as your learners will – notice the difference as you support them to find the meaning for themselves!

Books to look at

‘Accelerated learning for the twenty first century’
Colin Rose and Malcolm J Nicholl
‘The Accelerated Learning Handbook’
David Meier