

The qualities of a trainer

Paul Russell

Marine Education specialist

It would be reasonable to expect that anyone paying for a training course would be presented with an expert in the field of study indicated by the title of the course. However whether that person also knows if his/her subject matter will be learnt by the audience is a whole new question.

As a person who has taken the time to understand the theory of learning and the barriers to learning it is very interesting for me to see the different styles of presenters/trainers, who are attempting to deliver, sometimes complex information at training events.

Companies spend considerable amounts of their budgets on sending staff to expensive seminars and training events but do they know if they are getting value for money. Just having an industry expert at an event without that person having a basic idea about how to deliver information may be at best a waste of money and could have wider implications if there are safety issues involved.

An example of bad practice, which I am sure we have all experienced, is where a power point slide is shown that contains so much information and the font is so small that it cannot be read. If the presenter then compounds the felony and talks to the screen looking away from the audience then what chance has anyone of picking up the information?

If you can read pre-prepared material then you might pick up the point of the presentation but this surely is not the object of paying hard earned money to come to the training event in the first place. Within the circles of Maritime Education and Training (MET) this is quite a serious discussion topic and depending upon where the education and training event is taking place will determine the expectation of the level of competence of the 'educator'.

Corporate training is big business these days and there are some individuals carrying out a competent task. Train the trainer courses are having an impact worldwide on the competence of people delivering education and training at all levels.

In the UK, all lecturers in Further Education Colleges are required to be qualified teachers this was not always the case and is still not always the case in other countries. Therefore what should we expect for our money?

When first learning about the art of educating or training the message is that preparation, preparation, preparation is the key aspect to being able to deliver a good subject. Therefore the trainer should have the key facts and technicalities of the subject at his/her disposal.

Whether it is a short presentation or a longer course it should be borne in mind that people have a primary method of learning they are either Auditory, visual or kinaesthetic learners. This means that an individual's learning style is either by hearing the information, seeing the information or being involved in a practical aspect of the learning. It is difficult in a short presentation for trainers or presenters to get the students engaged in a practical activity but they should have a clear and interesting visual presentation ready and they should speak clearly with some variation in tone.

Another key aspect of learning is 'going from the known to the unknown' in other words the presentation should unfold and take the students on a journey which starts from something that they know and leads on to new information.

Some repetition is also a good practice so at all levels trainers should set out their objectives, give the subject matter in detail and then recap on what has been said. In this way the information is given three times.

Short presentations as part of corporate training events or seminars do not lend themselves to activity based methods of promoting learning. However organisers of such events owe it to their customers to ensure that the people delivering information have a basic understanding of what keeps students or audiences captivated and learning the subject under discussion by making sure that there is a thought process behind not just the technical material but also the quality of the provision.

Where there is enough time then trainers should organise the learning around an activity base. For example a crisis management course could use a bridge simulator to stage a collision and the bridge teams concerned could then go through a debrief from the collision and then attend subsequent press interview.

Some very rich learning can come from carefully constructed learning environments which don't always need to be resource hungry. But one of the most important qualities that any educator or trainer must do is to make sure that the learner reflects on his/her experience. It is this reflection that allows people to internalise their understanding and commit the information into their long term memory. This will also be accomplished by showing an obvious enthusiasm/passion for the subject.