

## What makes a good trainer?

By Matt Dyer

Training itself will only ever be as effective as the trainer delivering it and the quality of the trainer can make or break a program. It is not about what you know, it is about what your audience has learnt.

If we examine the meaning of the word trainer, it can be described as: “someone who guides and instructs people in a specific topic area”. We can take these same principles and apply that meaning to words such as tutor, mentor, teacher, manager or even boss. This highlights the level of expectation that may be placed upon someone undertaking a training role.



When I first started to think about what makes a good trainer, I thought about myself and how I approach it. Is it something that people just have a natural aptitude for or is it something that can be taught? I firmly believe that, whilst there are natural trainers, it is like any other skill; it can be taught and fostered through developing and utilising our skills.

My reading on the subject reveals thematically consistent qualities and competencies regarding what makes a good trainer. After considering these and applying my own perspective, I've consolidated the following thoughts that I would like to share with you.

Communication skills are vital! The ability to clearly and concisely explain and deliver content to an audience, to listen effectively and to adapt to what learners feel they need in terms of a topic content- are arguably key. Additionally, being able to ask the right questions to help learners differentiate between what they think they need and what they actually need to support them in their chosen role is also crucial.

When delivering a training event or presentation, there is an expectation that the trainer knows more than the audience, sometimes this is true, but not always! Manage expectations and admit that no-one can know everything about a subject area: highlighting this can endear you to your audience because it humanises you. A delivery should not be about showcasing what extensive knowledge the trainer has, but instead should focusing on the set of learning objectives that, as a trainer, you are there to deliver.

Presenting an air of confidence is crucial to help both trainer and audience relax and embark on a learning journey. The audience do not know the script, so if a presentation is delivered confidently that is what they will see, regardless of how many flaws you spot in your delivery upon self-evaluation after the event! Confidence can be developed through practice, by seeking feedback from others and incorporating those feedback ideas into future deliveries, strengthening your delivery and enhancing your own self-belief.

Be passionate about the subject and present with conviction. A passionate speaker engages an audience creating enthusiasm, interest and excitement. This may not come naturally to you, but you can build this into your delivery by incorporating real life stories that help an audience build a connection to your learning points. Furthermore, remember to encourage engagement.

Ask focused and reflective questions to generate discussion amongst the audience. As a trainer, this provides an opportunity for thinking and listening, enabling you to gauge their understanding and to provide additional information in support of a learning point if it is needed. Also, a key technique to try is to slow your delivery down when you deliver a key point, you may find that the slowness of the delivery helps the audience retain the information.

Interaction with an audience is always important and, in face-to-face deliveries, it may be easier to manage and assess specific understanding and comprehension through responses as well as the body language. Interaction becomes significantly more important when delivering remote sessions, where trainers cannot necessarily see each member of the audience who may be struggling. Trainers are therefore reliant on other methods to assess understanding, such as asking more focused questions or providing small quick tests to gauge each delegate is following the course content. As a trainer, identifying this is crucial as misunderstandings risk future misinterpretation, resulting in potentially poor advice further down the line that can also undermine the credibility of the trainer.

Encourage the audience to show what existing knowledge they have around a subject; what have they found that has worked, where have things failed for them. This kind of information helps a trainer understand the challenges they face on a day to day basis and can be used throughout the course by referring back to those problems and how the current piece of information being provided could assist and why. This will increase the engagement of the audience, encouraging them to feel part of the delivery so that trainers can, wherever possible, avoid a one-sided presentation. There may be occasions however, where the situation restricts this, normally based around the time made available.

Despite everything, without a doubt, the absolutely fundamental thing for being a good trainer is to simply be yourself. Do not try to be something you are not. You can be witty, show energy and passion but, if you try too hard, the audience will be able to see you are not presenting your true self and will be that an audience will find it harder to connect with you.

Know what you are capable of and what your own personality traits and characteristics are. Play to those strengths and your sincerity will shine through. Remember every trainer is different and it is down to you to find the balance.