

## **The Roles of a Trainer**

By Nanette Miner, Ed.D.

Many individuals come to training via the “expert” path. That is, they are so good at what they do that someone thinks “Hey, you could train others to do this!” and voila! a trainer is born.

The problem is, most folks who are “appointed” trainers don’t really know what their role is. Let me correct myself. They don’t know what their MANY roles will entail. Some roles will be more “global,” such as a consultant or manager, and others will be more task-specific, such as instructional designer or presenter. Here is a list of the many roles one might be expected to fulfill at any moment, when one is given the title of “trainer.”

### **Global Roles**

A recent study suggested that trainers, especially those who are the sole person responsible for training in their organization, spend at least half their time performing more global “support” functions than actually training people. The global roles are things that are not easy to identify or define. Global roles include consultant, coach, performance improvement specialist, manager and technical guru.

#### *Consultant*

Because the role of a trainer is innately a supportive function, one that exists to assist the rest of the organization to improve its performance, it’s sometimes difficult to keep the consultant’s perspective which is one of impartial analysis. When acting as a consultant, approach training requests as “assignments” which will require thoughtful analysis keeping in mind the needs of the workforce, the goals of the organization, and the best way to achieve an improved performance outcome.

You’ll soon come to find that what sometimes appears to be a training need really isn’t, and requires a different (read: non-training) solution (for example, hiring a new employee or purchasing a new piece of equipment.) Maintaining a consultant’s perspective enables you to gather information and data to make the right recommendations for the organization.

#### *Manager*

The global perspective of a Manager is a “person who leads or directs all or part of an organization, through the deployment and manipulation of resources (human, financial, material, intellectual or intangible)” (Source: [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)). This is an *exact* definition of managerial responsibilities. You may not have the title “manager,” but management will be a significant daily responsibility as you coordinate people, facilities, materials production and distribution, competing timelines and the business goals of the department(s) that you support.

#### *Coach*

One of the most efficient ways to develop other people is through coaching them. A coach helps an individual to define their goals and create a plan of action to achieve them. Much like an athletic-coach, the workplace-coach offers suggestions for improvement, helps the individual to refine their technique, and provides ongoing encouragement and support - they do not *actually do* the work. So, too, a trainer provides guidance, support, and ongoing encouragement for the

individual; while the responsibility for acquiring the new skills or knowledge lies squarely with the trainee.

### *Performance Improvement Specialist*

A performance improvement specialist is part consultant, part trainer, and part business manager. Like a consultant, performance improvement specialists look at the big picture to identify causes of poor performance and the appropriate way(s) to address the situation. While both a performance improvement specialist and a trainer are focused on increasing the performance of the business overall, the distinction lies in the fact that the performance improvement specialist looks at all approaches to solving the problem – not just training-related approaches. A trainer applies processes that address workers' lack of knowledge or skill and which affect their ability to do a job correctly; the performance improvement specialist addresses anything within the organization that may resolve poor performance.

### *Technical Guru*

Technology enables us to deliver training to participants across the globe, right at their desks. You may find yourself in charge of teleconferences, webinars, computer-based-training, or a number of other technology-based delivery methods. While you won't necessarily have to know how to *work* the technology, you will need to have a good understanding of what method of delivery would be more appropriate than another in a given situation. You'll also need to know what the technological capabilities of your organization are – both people and equipment. Are employees computer literate? Do they have ready-access to a computer? Do the computers have CD's, speakers, internet access? Become friends with the people in IT (the Information Technology department) – you'll find you interact with them a lot and you'll want them to know who you are and understand that your goal is to help the organization, not to slow *them* down.

## **Task Oriented Responsibilities**

Unlike the global roles you will fulfill, which are more or less invisible to an observer, other people in your organization will acknowledge when you are performing a training task. What follows is hardly an all-inclusive list of the various responsibilities, but it is a good grounding in what you can expect to do on a weekly, if not daily, basis. These tasks typically result in an "end product" or at least a move along a project plan path. You can use these descriptions when people ask, "What do you *do*?"

### *Training Designer*

Many organizations find that they need to custom-design training for their employees because the work that they do is unique or proprietary. For example, in almost all cases, a new-hire training program is custom designed for an organization because it is unique to the way that the organization does business. One of the reasons that you were appointed a trainer may be because your organization determined it had unique needs that it could not find training for "off-the-shelf," but knew that YOU possessed the knowledge to create.

### *Training Developer*

The developer actually *creates* the training based on the designer's plan and vision. The developer also creates the physical materials that will be used in the training such as workbooks

or handouts for the participants, leader guides for the presenters, and visual presentations such as PowerPoint slides, posters, video, and/or eLearning courseware.

### *Presenter*

Very often you will be the presenter of training. You'll want to be skilled in public speaking, group facilitation, questioning techniques, and time and meeting management.

### *Marketer*

In the big picture, training is all about change; and most people simply don't like to change. In addition, although management typically understands the value of training, managers frequently believe that they cannot afford to let their employees leave the work area in order to attend training class. Therefore, no matter what other roles you are fulfilling as a trainer, everything you do on a day-to-day basis needs to be infused with a marketing perspective.

### *Facilities Manager and Meeting Planner*

The administrative tasks of "facilities manager" may fall to you as well. You may be responsible for making sure that training related items are ordered and in stock; such as flip charts, markers, projectors, overhead projector bulbs, and pens and pencils for participants who show up with no writing tools. In addition, room reservations, room arrangement, and room comfort may all fall under your purview.

### *Evaluator*

Training is often seen as an expense to the organizational because of the time and money that goes into designing, developing, and presenting training. What is not as frequently tracked is the value that is *returned* as a result of people's new knowledge and skills gained via the training. In order to answer upper management's questions about the value of your training programs you will need evaluation skills

### **Summary**

This list is far from complete, but it does give you an idea of the many roles you might find yourself playing as a new trainer. Take a deep breath and enjoy the ride! Training is one of the most stimulating jobs you will every do.

###

Dr. Miner is the founder of the non-profit support group The Accidental Trainer; created to help all trainers who have found themselves "thrust" into the role. This article is based on ideas from her book by the same name, *The Accidental Trainer*, (c) John Wiley & Sons, Inc., (2006).