

Active Learning is Essential for Retention

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The inclusion of activities in any training program makes the training come to life for your participants as well as making it much more memorable in the long term. Often participants will remember the lessons learned through an activity much more vividly than they will had you just told them the information or had them read it on their own.

Some activities which can be used in your training programs include:

- ✓ Demonstrations
- ✓ Field Trips
- ✓ Games
- ✓ Role Playing

Here are some examples of each:

Demonstrations: Demonstrations are particularly useful when teaching a skill, such as software. Hook your computer up to an overhead projector and demonstrate the steps of order entry, for instance, as you are explaining each step. If you are teaching a more physical skill, such as machine repair or surveying, create activities that allow your participants to get hands-on experience. If you are teaching your participants to repair a photocopier, take it apart and demonstrate how it is reassembled; then allow your participants to do the same. If you are teaching surveyors to do their job, take them out to the parking lot of the training facility and give them some marks to use to determine distance – such as your car and a near by building.

Field trips: Field trips can take two forms: internal and external. Internal field trips are walking tours of your facility. They are helpful when employees need to know the spectrum of the organization in order to do their jobs well. Rather than simply explain the various departments within the organization, get everybody up and on a walking tour so that they can see where admissions is, where the HR department is, where the maintenance room is, etc. The other form of field trip is a site visit. If your organization sells to other businesses, try to schedule a field trip to visit one of your clients so that trainees have an understanding of where their work goes when it is finished, or how it is ultimately used on the job.

Games: Games can be used in a variety of ways; as a review of content that is already taught, or as a way to teach the content to begin with. Some examples include a jeopardy style game in which you ask your participants to answer questions about what they've just learned, which you have divided in to 4 or 5 topical areas. Or you can have participants learn the content via a game. As an example, when training sales people to overcome objections, split the participants in to teams and have them come up with objections they might hear from prospects. Each team then "pitches" their objection (one at a time) to the other teams to spur the other teams to come up with viable responses based on certain criteria which you have taught them. (such as respond to an objection by restating the objection, stating a fact or feature about your product, and relating it, as a benefit, to the client's known needs). The team that "pitched" then chooses the winning response and the debrief includes a discussion of why the response was the right approach.

Role Playing: Role plays are always good activities when you are teaching interpersonal skills such as selling, negotiating, or counseling. A role play can be conducted with two or three individuals. The two primary role players are the person who is practicing the skills (such as a salesperson or counselor) and the person who is playing the role of the recipient (such as a prospect or an adolescent). A third person may be added to the role play scenario if you would like to have an observer give feedback to the person practicing their skills. So the observer would watch the interaction between the two primary players and then give feedback, such as “you seemed unsure of what to do next,” or “you did a great job linking product X to the client’s stated needs.” When conducting role-plays, be sure that the person playing the role of the observer also gets a chance to practice the new skill.

We are so familiar with the standard learning “model” of sitting quietly in class while listening to an instructor at the front of the room that we often forget how powerful activities and visceral experiences can be when learning new information and skills. Once you’ve designed a new training class, put it aside for 2 or 3 days, then come back and look at it anew to assess whether you can take some of the lecture or more sedate portions of your training and turn them in to experiential activities instead.