

Let's Sleep On It – Part One

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When we are creating training, we often have a flow of consciousness – we put down everything we know about a topic and create some supporting materials such as a participant workbook or slides that complement a fire hose of information.

This is a great first start to the design of any training program, but it definitely should not be the final product. A design of this nature implies, nay *forces*, the trainer to lecture through the information; and the worst way for employees to learn anything is to sit passively and listen. Once you have transcribed or put to paper the major content pieces of your topic, put it aside for two to three days and then return to it with fresh eyes and the perspective: How else could the audience learn this, without me telling them?

Two examples:

ONE: For instance, in a sales training class you might tell your participants who your major competitors are and what products they carry that compete with yours. You could also design this learning as a scavenger hunt, dividing your participants' in to teams and assigning them each a competitor to research on the internet. Allow 20 - 30 minutes for research and give the teams a checklist of items that they need to identify at the competitor's site. Each team then returns to the training room to make a presentation to the larger group. You've accomplished the same learning objective; however your participants have a much more active role and are more likely to remember the information than if you were to simply tell it to them. In addition, you've added another skill of researching competitors, which is a skill that the participants will be able to use over and over again when new competitors join the marketplace or your current competitors release new products.

TWO: Very often data input training is presented via an instructor using an overhead projector and discussing the various fields and how they are to be completed – for instance when teaching new customer service representatives (CSRs) the software that your company uses. While this is active for the instructor, it is very passive for the learners. A much better approach is to have each learner at his or her own computer and allowing him/her to follow along – inputting data and manipulating the keyboard in order to correctly populate the software they are learning.

Cognitive skills such as leadership or decision making are often the most difficult to make active and also the most crucial to make active. It would be nearly impossible to create a good manager by simply telling him, “these are the skills you should possess,” such as paraphrasing or giving corrective feedback – these skills absolutely require someone to practice what they sound like and how to create the appropriate phrases and interactions with their employees. Interpersonal skills and behaviors benefit greatly from case studies, role plays, and practice opportunities.

When we are new to designing training, it is natural for us to default to lecturing and transmitting knowledge and information only, but it is more beneficial for our learners to be actively involved in the training. Therefore, once you create your first pass at a new training program, put it down for two to three days and come back to it from the perspective of, “How is this best learned?” rather than from our typical perspective, “How can I teach them about this?” When you look at your training content from the *learner's* perspective, it is easier to identify a lack of activity which can translate into your participant's becoming bored, overwhelmed, and tuning out.