

## Engage Your Audience - 7 Rules That Make a Difference in Training Design

You're logging into a new online course, or you're walking into a classroom for a day-long workshop. You're enthused, ready to learn!

Then the first slide or page appears. You're greeted with text-heavy, 10-point font and loads of bullet points. It's gonna be a long day.

We've all experienced it. Courses with one-way communication and information overload - both guaranteed content killers. Below are seven rules to help bring courses back to life, adapted from a webinar presented by Carmine Gallo (The New Rules of Persuasive Pitching, November 2008).

Keep these rules in mind when designing training for groups, one-on-one situations, and virtual classrooms. Many of these points can be adapted for e-learning too. They'll make a difference for your audience!

- **Rule #1: Create a hot start.** Your audience makes up their mind about you and the course within the first few minutes, and that impression tends to last throughout the experience. Make the most of those few minutes by creating a compelling introduction that doesn't include reading the agenda, overview, or objectives from a slide. Your introduction should peak curiosity and engagement, and maybe even surprise the audience. Polls are a simple way to create a hot start, and are especially helpful with engaging the audience in a virtual course. If you're in a face-to-face or e-learning situation, a simple question or video is a great start.
- **Rule #2: Deliver an emotionally charged event.** The brain refuses to pay attention to boring things! Plus it interprets words as pictures, so when your slide or page is full of text and bulleted lists, the brain goes into overload and can't compute. The result? A disengaged, bored-to-tears audience. Focus on creating meaning before providing details. It shows people why they should care. Instead, use stories. Our brains are programmed for stories because they create meaning and help us better retain information. Review your content and select some places where a story might better convey your points. If this is an e-learning course, consider an audio recording for more variety.
- **Rule #3: Enforce the 10-minute rule.** No matter how engaging the material or instructor, it's human nature for people to tune out after ten minutes. Solve this by restructuring your content to include a change every ten minutes. Introduce an emotionally charged event - a question, story, or activity will all work to keep your audience with you.
- **Rule #4: Think visually.** People remember about 10% of spoken information. They remember 65% of that same information when paired with a relevant visual. Back to rule #2, pair a story with that visual for the most impact. The use of metaphors also helps the audience retain major points by painting a visual with words.
- **Rule #5: Stimulate all the senses.** When using several senses in a learning experience, the chances of staying engaged increase substantially. Your approach will largely depend on your medium. In live courses, use a blend of activities, physical movement, videos, and discussion. In the virtual classroom, give mouse control to a learner, use polls, ask questions, and allow for chatting. With e-learning, combine video, audio, user demos, and thoughtful interactions.
- **Rule #6: Create Twitter-like headlines.** Have you heard of Twitter? The concept behind this microblogging tool is to use 140 characters or less to communicate with others - your "tweets." The fact is we're conditioned to pay attention to short bites of information - think headlines, YouTube, and blogs. In adult learning, smaller pieces of information that can be immediately applied have much more impact than long, drawn-out content. Can you communicate your content and ideas with brevity? Start by giving it a try with learning objectives. Can learners immediately get why a course is important to them and what they will take away from it?

- **Rule #7: Practice deliberately.** The cold, hard truth - just because we do something all the time doesn't mean we're necessarily good at it. The very best presenters, coaches, trainers, and facilitators set goals, solicit immediate feedback, and use that feedback to stretch their skills. The next time you create or deliver a course, set a goal. It could be to use more stories, change your pacing, or improve voice pitch. Try a short survey with specific questions about what was good, and what could be improved - use that to stretch yourself the next time. If you're a trainer or facilitator, consider joining a group like Toastmasters to improve public-speaking skills.

Keep these rules in mind for your next live, virtual, or e-learning course. Even if you implement just one or two, you'll see the positive results!

### **About the Author**

Amy Franko is the owner and principal learning designer of Amy Franko Consulting. With 12 years of business experience in sales, marketing, and project management, she understands that training programs must energize the learner, provide knowledge and tools that can be used immediately, and when necessary, become a dependable source of revenue and profit.

Amy is a certified Book Yourself Solid™ business coach. The group she's most passionate about serving is women who are solo service professionals. She uses a simple system of protocols specifically designed to bring more ideal clients into their business, even if marketing and selling isn't something they like to do.

You can learn more about her by visiting her LinkedIn profile (<http://www.linkedin.com/in/amyfranko>) or following her on Twitter (<http://www.twitter.com/amyfranko>).

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