

Training Myths

Harold D. Stolovitch and Erica Keeps dedicate an entire chapter in their book *Telling Ain't Training* to dispelling myths about learning. I've listed a few of these myths and added some additional thoughts about each.

1. Performance experts make the best trainers.

We've all known experts who have had a difficult time explaining the very thing they know how to do so well. Part of becoming an expert entails consolidating what we know. This however can cause an expert to skip over the details. And the details are important to new learners.

Instructing on the other hand is really more about having a concern or understanding of where your learners are at rather than simply imparting what you know. Learners, of course, must also be motivated to learn. So the ability to relate to and engage your learners is an important part of the process.

As individuals, our instinct is always to protect and promote ourselves within our own environment. So it is not surprising that when placed in front of an audience and handed the microphone we are not tempted to first establish ourselves by telling everything we know. But good trainers are confident enough in what they know, to stop, ask questions, and listen.

I met a fellow the other day over lunch that was very knowledgeable on many different subjects. He did not hesitate to tell you all he knew, however, as soon as the conversation shifted to another speaker, his head turned from the table, his eyes wondering across the room, as if it was absolute torture for him to listen to another speaker for even a single moment. Unfortunately, as it turns out, this self absorbed individual was, yes, you guessed it, a teacher.

2. People process information differently, so it is important to determine individual learning preferences and incorporate these into your teaching style.

This is sort of true. For example some of us prefer to process information delivered to us through our hearing verses received visually. Some enjoy processing data that is delivered to us sequentially, or in small bits rather than having to engage in complex reasoning or problem solving. It would be difficult however in a classroom setting to determine individual learning preferences, and impossible to tailor a program that would meet and match each individual's learning style. Our best alternative is to ensure that we offer a sort of mixed bag and incorporate many different learning methods to help people to assimilate the learning.

3. The more enjoyable the instruction the greater the level of learning achieved.

You'd think a guy like me, who develops training games, would really come down on the side of this particular myth. It turns out however that enjoyment in and of itself does not directly correlate to better learning. Learning is hard work and "effort in" naturally correlates to positive results.

Trainers often get rave reviews when the training is made fun. Participants comment that the class was great because they enjoyed the review game at the end of the class, but they really did not learn much. Often our customers are looking for something that will "spice up" the learning experience. They may have tried a game at one time or another and found their class loved it.

Games are fun, but if not done correctly, can be tantamount to tossing the baby out with the bath water.

It is great to play a game and have your group energized as they answer true/false and multiple choice questions to try and win. But imagine using these moments when people become energized and interested to inject some additional learning. To learn you need first to be attentive. Games are great attention grabbers. I am simply suggesting stopping the game for a moment and giving learners an opportunity to think about, discuss, and explore the learning. We have tried to design games that allow trainers to train while playing the game. In most TGI games after the question is asked or answered the trainer has the opportunity to expound on the topic by introducing additional information (perhaps a mini- PowerPoint presentation) or a training exercise. In this way the game can be used to deliver new information rather than just a review piece. The process of capturing a participant's attention and then providing them a means of assimilating the information is key to successful learning.

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