



There's no substitute for knowing your presentation topic well. That may seem obvious, but I've attended workshops where the facilitator depended too heavily on visual and other support materials to cover a lack of preparation and lapses in his or her personal knowledge of the presentation topic.

Your participants need to feel confident you know what you're talking about and that you're well prepared to give them the information they came for. They've made an investment in time and money and they have expectations that you're an expert on your topic.

They need to hear, see and experience the presentation in several ways. Too much of any one approach loses its impact and effectiveness. Your verbal presentations need to be supported by materials your participants can see and activities they can be physically involved in.

This creates a balance that demonstrates your attention to preparation, your depth of knowledge of your topic and your concern for the different learning styles of everyone present.

Even if your workshop relies heavily on visual presentations or hands-on activities, you need to encourage questions and discussion. Knowing your topic well gives you the confidence to present your information in a variety of ways and to welcome participation.

Workshop Success

Good, solid information is essential for your seminar or workshop success. That's a given. But it's not enough. You've known people who are smart and knowledgeable but aren't good at facilitating the learning of others.

I've had a few teachers and facilitators like that, haven't you? I've also had some masterful teachers, trainers and facilitators who weren't necessarily smarter than the poor ones. They just knew how to assist others in learning well. Those are the facilitators that experience workshop success.

Good facilitators are enthusiastic about their topics and about assisting others to achieve their goals. Good facilitators challenge the learners while making learning easy and fun, which leads to long term retention.

You don't have to go back to college for a degree in education to be a good teacher, workshop facilitator or trainer. You CAN use the information and techniques that the masterful teachers and facilitators use to be successful and attain your own workshop



success. A workshop leader is a presenter, a facilitator, a trainer—a teacher. Many of the same learning principles that work in the elementary school classroom work in a training session for business executives. I've taught both and the principles I used in public school are alive and well in my workshops for adults.

It's a mistake to assume facilitators of adults must totally change the way a good teacher teaches children or young adults. Not only is there a child within each one of us, but the way people learn remains basically the same.

I'm not suggesting that we treat workshop participants like children, but that we use what has been scientifically proven and experientially discovered about how people learn fast and remember longer.

To achieve workshop success, you must take into consideration that each learner has a different learning style. Some need to primarily see, others hear and others to experience. The most successful learning involves using all the senses. That's how a child learns naturally and how adults learn too.

Sitting and listening isn't enough. Learners need to be engaged in their own learning process. They need to be able to hear the information, see the information and have the opportunity to practice and use it.

As you plan your workshop, create plentiful opportunities for your participants to participate fully—to see, to listen, to speak, to practice, to discover, to play, to create and to imagine.

Communication Clarity: Be Specific

Go through all your presentation material and check it for communication clarity. The information in your head may not always get translated clearly to your presentation.

When you give an instructions, explain and follow with examples. Look over your information and ask yourself if the related what, how, who, when, where and how questions have been answered. Examples of communication clarity:

- If you're giving a business seminar and tell your participants to follow up with their customers and clients, then you need to give examples of the what, why, how and when of follow-up.
- If you suggest using a certain kind of product, you need to be clear about why, where to find it and how to use it.
- When referring to someone, the word "expert" is vague, but referring to Dr. Knowsalot at Harvard Business School is specific.
- If you say, "Statistics prove ____" be prepared to back up your statement with specifics.



Your participants will certainly ask questions. The ideal, of course, is to have all the answers to all the questions. When you have the answers, be specific. If you don't have the answers, it's better to say, "I don't know," than to be vague.

The more thoroughly you prepare and do your homework, the more confident you feel and the more confidence your participants will have in you, even if you don't know all the answers. You can be forgiven not having all the answers, but your participants will be less forgiving if you give them vague answers.

Communication Success = Rapport

One of the most important ingredients of communication success is establishing and maintaining rapport. Whether your communication is with one person or several hundred, to be effective and get the outcomes you want, harmonious relationship with the people you're communicating with is essential.

Next time you go to a restaurant, observe the people sitting with each other. Often what you'll see is the people leaning toward one other, smiling, making eye contact and mirroring each other's movements. They're in rapport. Friends and lovers do it naturally.

When you're in front of a group of people, facilitating a workshop or seminar, you want to make friends with them. You want to establish a harmonious relationship from the beginning of the workshop, or even before, to pave the way for the successful communication. You want people to be receptive and enthusiastic. Part of their responsiveness to your presentation depends on the rapport you establish.

Teaching others what you know is more than just presenting information. It's the facilitator's job to provide a learning environment that is considerate of the learners' needs and comfort. It's his job to treat each individual with respect, to listen with intention and to address questions and concerns with interest. This is part of the rapport-building process that determines his communication success.

High-tech presentations can be dazzling, but without rapport they can be just so much momentary razzle-dazzle. Plan, prepare and practice a great presentation, always remembering your personal relationship with your learners.

Smile, laugh, listen. Have a good time and they will too. When they're having a good time, the environment is pleasant and interesting, the material is good, the presentation is polished and they feel acknowledged, they'll learn better and remember it longer.

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