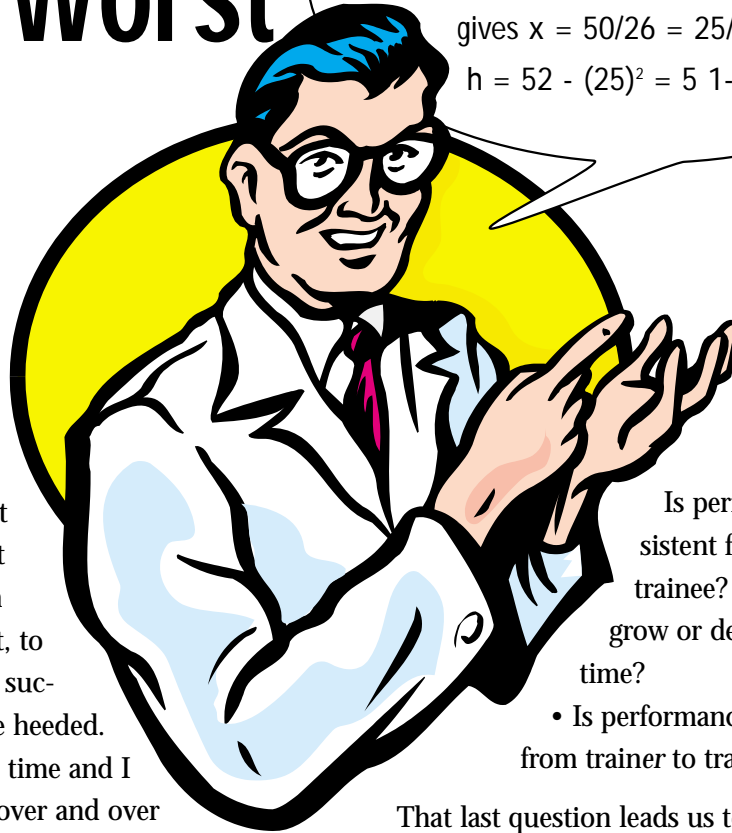


The Best People Make the Worst Trainers

By Nanette Miner, EdD

Get your attention with that one, didn't I? No, this isn't some philosophical axiom like "only the good die young." But, to make training in your organization successful, it is a truism that should be heeded. I have been in training a long, long time and I consistently see the same problem over and over in organizations that have very talented people but very poor training. What is that reason? Well... let me ask YOU a few question before we get to that answer.

- How were the trainers in your organization chosen?
- What is their educational background?
- Have they attended a Train the Trainer-type certification?
- Do they belong to a training association where they can continually keep up their skills and steal best practices from other trainers?
- How are your trainees faring? Can they DO what they've gone to the training for?
- What's the success rate of your training programs?



$25 + h^2 + x^2, 144 = h^2 + y^2, \text{ and } 13 = x + y$ so... $144 = h^2 + y = h^2 + (13-x)^2 = h^2 + x^2 + 169 - 26x = 25 + 169 - 26x$, which gives $x = 50/26 = 25/13$, and $h = 52 - (25)^2 = 51 - 25 = 26$

Is performance consistent from trainee to trainee? Do their skills grow or degenerate over time?

- Is performance consistent from trainer to trainer?

That last question leads us to the crux of the problem in so many organizations. Most organizations think: Good salesperson? Make them the trainer! Excellent Customer Service Rep? They should train others! This guy could program in his sleep - he should lead the system conversion training! There are a number of reasons why your star performer should not be your trainer, here are a few:

A number of years ago someone coined the term *edutainment*. Although it may offend your sensibilities, it does ring true. Easily 50% of the job of the trainer is to keep the trainees' attention and keep them engaged in the learning. This skill does not come naturally to a lot of people.

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People who are good, technically, at what they do, tend to embrace the technicalities of what they do. To put it bluntly, they bore their audience. Good trainers have a well honed skill for separating what is a “need to know,” from what is “nice to know.” Techies believe *everything* is important. Since the trainees are new, they can’t make the differentiation between need-to-know and nice-to-know either, resulting in information overload for the trainees.

Motivation. Many times people are very, very good at what they do because that is exactly what they enjoy doing. They don’t want to train others. They want to do the work they were hired to do.

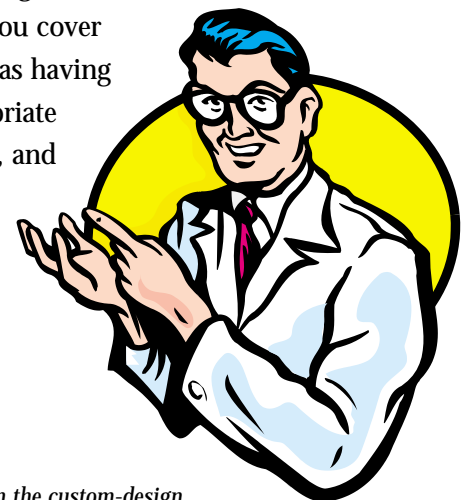
Good trainers make training look easy. It’s not. To be good at training others you need to understand the five basic tenets of adult learning. Your presentation skills can’t be good, they must be flawless. You must be able to laugh at yourself and comfortable saying “I don’t know,” when you don’t know. You must possess *extreme* patience. You must be able to handle dissent well. And above all, you must be able to explain concepts in more than one way.

Lastly, there is a model for learning that addresses the progression of knowledge acquisition. At the low-end is unconscious/incompetence - where the individual doesn’t know something - and doesn’t know that he doesn’t know. Of course, these people should not train others! Next is conscious/incompetence - in this phase the person is aware of what skills or knowledge they are lacking. This usually prompts the need and

desire to acquire the missing skills and/or knowledge (e.g. training). The third level is the conscious/competence phase in which the individual now has the skills and/or knowledge but is still overtly thinking about them while doing them (remember how intently you concentrated on all of the steps involved in driving, when you first learned to drive?).

Finally, one achieves unconscious/competence meaning the skills and/or knowledge are ingrained, second-nature, no longer thought about. How often do you consciously think about using your turn signal nowadays? While this final phase is the one we hope our employees achieve for productivity sake - it can be detrimental when trying to make our best workers trainers. Many folks in the unconscious/competence phase can no longer explain what they do - the 13 decision steps required before they make a recommendation, the ability to know when something is out of alignment because of the sound it makes, or knowing the precise moment to close the sale.

If you’d truly like to make your best workers your best trainers as well, then return to the questions posed at the beginning of the article and make sure you cover those bases; as well as having trainers with appropriate knowledge, abilities, and motivation.



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