

# How To Be A Top Trainer



***Alan Matthews***  
[www.transformyourtraining.com](http://www.transformyourtraining.com)

# How To Be A Top Trainer

### What separates the best trainers from the rest?

What are the characteristics of the most effective trainers and how can you push yourself that bit further and go from being a good trainer to becoming an outstanding one?



I've been involved in learning and development for over 18 years, running highly technical courses as well as soft skills training. I've run trainer development courses for about 15 years and worked with hundreds of trainers. Here are my thoughts about what makes the very best ones stand out.

- **Top trainers get people in a receptive state to learn.**



There is one thing you always have to remember about adults – you can't *make* them learn anything.

Unless your group are in the right state to learn, nothing you do will make any difference. Oh, and by the way, it's *your* job to get them in the right state (strangely, no – one tells you that when you start training).

What do I mean by the right "state"? I mean people need to be mentally and emotionally ready to learn. They need to be:

- curious
- eager
- interested
- alert
- energised
- comfortable ( i.e. not anxious )
- clear about what's going to happen ( as opposed to confused or uncertain )

Does that describe the people you generally see when you look out at the group at the start of your training? If not, welcome to the real world of training.

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What stops people being in this state? Well, lots of things, unfortunately:

- they have other issues on their minds, e.g. problems at home or work they have to do
- worries about the training, e.g. will it be difficult, will they be shown up in some way, will they have to do a role play ( aaaargh ), will everyone else on the course know more than them ( this is a really common fear amongst people attending courses )
- resistance – because they don't see why they're there, because they didn't want to be there in the first place, they were sent rather than choosing to come, because they've had bad experiences before on training courses
- boredom ( real or anticipated )
- lack of relevance – they don't know how the training will actually help them - adults need to see a reason for learning, few learn anything just for the joy of it.

Any, or all, of these things can stop someone from being in a receptive state.

A weakness with many Train the Trainer courses is that they focus on training delivery techniques but fail to cover the essential skill of getting adults in the right frame of mind to learn in the first place. If you can't do this, no fancy techniques will save you.

So how can you do it? Here are 7 steps.

## 1. Answer their ( often unspoken ) questions.

Some of these questions will be about the value of the training, some will be about logistics - what time will it finish, what time is lunch, will there be time to check emails?



Other questions will be about what is going to happen - what will people be asked to do, what is expected of them, will it be interesting, will there be any role plays ( aaaargh )?

Answer these questions at the start in your introduction and in the way you begin the course.

- tell people exactly what the training will cover ( most people don't really know this when they turn up for a course )
- tell them exactly what benefit they'll get from it and how it will help them in practical terms

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- tell them what activities will be involved and what they'll be expected to do
- tell them when the breaks are and when the course will finish ( so they know when they'll be able to check messages, leave to pick up the children, etc.
- be approachable and friendly so they know you're going to be nice to them
- ask them how they feel about being there, what their concerns are and what they want to get from it
- avoid using terms which may trigger anxiety, e.g. " role play " and do not make people do anything which could make them feel too vulnerable

These are not difficult things to do, and they needn't take a long time, but many trainers fail to cover them adequately. They assume that, because people have turned up, they know what the course is about, what's going to happen and why they're there. This is a big mistake!

### **2. Recognise their concerns.**

Be open about the fact that some people will be reluctant to be there. Accept that they may feel anxious about what they have to do or concerned about the amount of time they'll be away from their work. This will show them that you understand them and that you're concerned about them.

I sometimes ask people, " On a scale of 0 - 10, how much choice did you have about coming today? "

That may seem risky, but I'd rather know if people are feeling resistant, at least then I know I have to work that bit harder to get them on my side. Also, acknowledging that they didn't choose to be there establishes a bit of a rapport, they know that I understand their situation.

Once you know their concerns, focus on the positives, especially on the benefits they'll get from attending the training.

" OK, now I know that most of you haven't chosen to be here today, but here's what you're going to get from the day and why I'm confident that, at the end of the session, you'll agree that it was a really good use of your time. "

### **3. Build rapport.**

Without rapport you have nothing. You may as well get your coat and go home.

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Rapport means that people like you, at least a bit. They feel some connection with you, that you understand them and that you care about them getting something useful from the training.

As an American trainer once said, " They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. " That may sound trite but it's absolutely true. If people don't get a sense that you really do care about them, they won't work with you.

You can show that concern by asking them what they want from the course, what their concerns are ( see above ) and by stressing how much they'll get from the training.

You also build rapport by showing that you understand people's situations, how they're feeling and what problems they face. Where possible, show that you have something in common with them.

What people do *not* want is a trainer stood at the front who doesn't seem to know or care much about them, who's just going through the motions and churning out the same course they've done lots of times before, with no reference to the actual people they're training.

## **4. Build positive expectations about the training.**

This is a big weakness of internal training, in my experience. Far too little thought is given to how the training is "marketed " internally. Often, potential participants are just sent a bare outline of a course, usually with an uninspiring name such as, " Time Management " and asked ( or told ) to sign up for it.



Then they may receive some basic joining instructions, which just tell them where and when to show up for the training. No wonder people don't always arrive in the most positive frame of mind!

Send people useful pre - course information, send them questionnaires to ask them what they want to get from the training, make your materials bright, colourful and interesting to get their attention. Put your picture on the front so they know what you look like, tell them something about yourself.

Give your training an interesting name and tell people what they will learn. Instead of Time Management, call the training, " How To Get More Done In Less Time ". This suggests the benefit they will get from the training as well as just sounding more interesting.

Some people expect training to be boring, irrelevant or a waste of time. This may be because the training they've had in the past has been like this.

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You need to show that yours will be different. Whet their appetites before the course and they will turn up with a more positive attitude.

### 5. Design an attractive environment.

What does your training room look like when people walk in?

Does it look interesting, stimulating and attractive? Does it look like the sort of place that people would want to spend a few hours in?



If not, do something about it. Put posters on the walls, brighten the place up with pictures, toys, books, bright course materials, anything to make it look appealing. Play some music if you like.

This makes a world of difference. I've sometimes had people walk past my training rooms, who weren't involved in the training, saying, " It looks interesting in there, I wish I was on that course. "

I take that as the ultimate compliment.

### 6. Get them active.

One thing people dread is being bored. They don't want to sit through a tedious lecture. They want to be involved and active. So get them moving from the beginning. Have an interactive opening to your course or session, get people talking to each other and, ideally, physically moving around.

Yes, there are always " house keeping " points to cover at the start, but don't begin the whole session with a long list of admin items, get people doing something interesting from the beginning.

**Warning** – if you're going to start with an " ice – breaker " ( and there are good reasons to do this ) choose it carefully. Make sure it's relevant and appropriate to your group and to the course. Many trainers just pick something from a book of " 101 training games " and don't consider whether it's really suitable. As a result, I've seen groups asked to do things they felt were pointless or even embarrassing ( e.g. " all walk round making the sound of a farmyard animal and find people making the same sound as you " ) and the activity backfires.

### 7. Make sure you are in the right state yourself.

You cannot get your participants in a positive frame of mind if you're not in one yourself. If you turn up feeling tired, bored, frustrated, annoyed or anxious, that's what will come over to them and that's how they will feel.

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And, let's be honest, we're not always in the best frame of mind ourselves by the time we get to the training room, are we?

So, whatever happens before you get there, whatever sort of mood you're in, get yourself energised and positive before you start.

There are different ways to do this - some people listen to favourite music to either relax them or get them energised, some do a few exercises, some take a few minutes for quiet reflection or visualise themselves in front of a group delivering a fantastic training session.

Whatever works for you, be aware of your own state and get yourself in the right mood. If you want people to be energised, curious, engaged, awake, interested and positive, that has to start from you.

So there you are some tips for getting positive participants! Go through the list and give yourself a mark out of 10 for how well you achieve each of these at the moment. Is there room for improvement?

- **Top trainers are facilitators and make learning interactive instead of just presenting information.**

The best trainers know when to intervene and when to get out of the way while people are learning. They're facilitators, i.e. they design, initiate and manage situations so that people can learn. Their role is to help the group to learn in a variety of ways, not just to tell them information.

They're not "trainers" in the traditional sense that they see themselves as the fount of all knowledge, their role being to pass on their pearls of wisdom to the group, who know less than they do. They understand that people can learn from each other, not just from the person running the course or session.

They also know that learning is an active process, not a passive one. The presentation or lecture style of training is almost worthless as research shows that people take in very little and retain even less.



People learn by:

- processing new information, doing something with it, applying it
- solving problems
- working with others, sharing knowledge and forming ideas through discussion

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- keeping the brain alert by moving around, supplying it with oxygen
- by coming to realise or understand something for themselves rather than just being told it.

All this means that people need to be involved, active and engaged to learn, even just to stay awake. How can you make sure this happens?

There are many ways to keep things interactive:

### 1. Constantly ask questions of the group to lead them through the learning.



My rule of thumb is never *tell* people something which you could draw out of them through questioning. Most trainers underuse this approach, they present information then ask a few questions at the end.

You can do this even with very technical material if you start from something people are familiar with. For example, I used to train people in Tax legislation and I would try to start from situations the participants might have come across. For example, if I was talking about Capital Gains Tax, which is based on selling assets, I would ask them what sort of things they had bought and sold themselves that they would think of as “ assets “.

By getting them to think through their own experiences, I got their interest, I positioned the topic as something which was not completely alien to them and I got their minds working. I wouldn't have done any of this I'd just started lecturing them on the finer points of Capital Gains Tax without asking any questions.

If you're going to ask questions, make sure you use a variety, e.g. make sure you ask plenty of open questions, such as, “ What do you think about this? “ or, “ What would you do if...? ” not just closed questions which only require “ yes “ or “ no “ answers.

Use probing questions to challenge people to think more deeply and to draw out their reasoning. For example, “ What makes you say that? “, “ How do you think that would work? “

Avoid “ multiple questions “ where you ask more than one question and confuse people, e.g., “ How would you deal with an angry customer? Do you think it would be best to walk away or to wait until he calms down, have you ever come across this in practice? “

There's a very common mistake I see in trainers which is one of the main reasons they don't get the response they want ( and it's very easy to correct ).

They simply don't allow enough time for people to think about their answers before moving on.

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It takes a while for people to think, “ Do I understand this question? Can I think of an answer to it? Do I want to share this answer with the rest of the group? What if it’s silly or wrong? “

Quite a few seconds can have gone by before they’re ready to speak, so you need to just wait and look around the group for a while to give them space to think and consider their replies. Too many trainers rush on at this point, nervous about the silence, and cut off the chance for people to come up with a considered response.

## **2. Take every opportunity to use group discussion and working in pairs**

Use some well thought – out questions as a basis for group work or for people to work together in pairs. This is the quickest way to get a good discussion going. It will also give some people a chance to get involved who are uncomfortable about speaking in front of the whole group.



This is particularly good for brainstorming ideas or for getting people to talk about real – life experiences or how they will apply what they’ve learned so far.

## **3. Encourage the group to ask you questions throughout.**

The session should not be a long lecture, with a few minutes left at the end for questions. It should be more of a conversation, a dialogue, with plenty of questions throughout.

Many trainers have perfected a technique where they ask for questions in a way which guarantees they won’t get any, e.g. “ Well, it’s just about lunchtime, but are there any questions before we break? “

Or they end a presentation by asking, “ Any questions? “ in a tone of voice which suggests they don’t really want any, they just feel obliged to ask.

Instead, try asking, “ Who has a question, or a comment or any thoughts about what we’ve been discussing? “ This sounds much more inviting. Then stand back and wait, giving people plenty of time to think about whether they want to say anything.

Make it clear that you’re happy to take questions whenever they arise so that people feel free to contribute. If a question is really inappropriate or you don’t want to stop and spend time on it at that moment, ask the person to “ park “ it for a while and then make sure you get back to it. But, as far as possible, deal with questions as they arise because a question means that someone has something on his or her mind and may be distracted by it if they don’t get an answer.

### **4. Use quizzes, puzzles, pictures and games to make the learning more active – and get the group to make up their own.**



Find ways to make the material you're using as interactive and engaging as possible. Build in quick activities as ways to deliver information but also to recap and review what's been covered.

Often, the most learning and creativity occurs when participants are asked to design their own activities, such as quizzes and games, rather than being given one by the trainer. For example, get groups to make up quick quizzes for each other based on pictures or key words on cards or to present short sketches to each other based on well - known TV programmes to recap key points they've learned.

I'm always amazed at the ideas participants come up with when asked. And, of course, you can always "borrow" their great ideas to use yourself on later courses.

### **5. Use the "set piece" activities, such as role plays, case studies and team activities.**

These are often longer activities and may be used to reinforce what's been learned, to brainstorm ideas or to practice skills.

The key thing about any such activity is that the trainer must be clear about its purpose. What is the objective of the activity, why are you using it and why have you chosen this one?

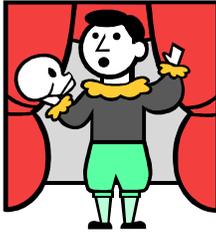
Any activity should be used because it has a specific function at this point in the training and it should have a clear outcome.

Before you use any activity, make sure you have thought about:

- the objectives
- the key learning points
- how exactly you're going to set up the activity, to introduce it and explain it
- what resources you'll need for it
- how you'll debrief the activity to draw out the learning ( *never* use an activity without allowing time to debrief it properly )
- what impact the activity will have on the "state" of your learners

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In particular, trainers need to be careful about the use of role plays ( aaaargh ) as many people hate the thought of them.

If they're essential so that learners can practise skills, it may be helpful to avoid the term " role play " and say something like " skills practice " instead since that's actually what it is.

Also, try to avoid asking people to pretend to be someone they're not, just get them to practice their skills with someone else taking the " role " ( e.g. yourself or another trainer or someone else from the organisation ).

Many trainers know that they should use some activity, so they throw in one or two of the " set pieces " but the top trainers build interaction into everything they do. It's not something added on but an integral part of their design of any training.

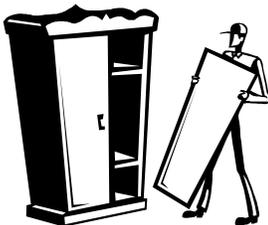
As a guide, when you design training, break each session into, say, 10 - minute chunks and ask the question, " What are the participants *doing* at this point? " Are they sitting down, listening, talking, moving, etc.?

If they seem to be spending most of their time just sitting listening to you, you need to redesign the session.

- **Top trainers cater for different learning styles.**

Different people can have very significant differences in the way that they approach learning.

For example, take the IKEA test.



If you bought an IKEA flat-pack wardrobe and you had to assemble it yourself, would you spread out all the pieces carefully and read through the instructions before you started or would you just start putting the pieces together, working it out as you went along?

Another example - if you need to get somewhere you haven't been before, do you prefer to look at a map or do you like written directions? I know I can't remember directions for more than a few seconds ( if someone says, " Take the first left, then second right, then go over the lights..." it goes in one ear and out the other ) but I can keep the picture of a map in my head for ages.

There are lots of different theories about learning styles, some focus on the process people use to learn and others on the senses they prefer to use to take in information.

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For example, Honey & Mumford describe 4 types of learners – Activists, Reflectors, Theorists and Pragmatists.

Activists enjoy doing things rather than talking about them. They may get impatient when asked to discuss ideas or feedback for any length of time.

Reflectors like to look at situations from all angles. They like to research, consider and plan before taking any action. They like to listen to discussions but also to spend time by themselves thinking and processing information.

Theorists like to generalise and make connections between ideas. They like to discuss models and theories. They think problems through step- by-step and don't take action without thinking it through first.

Pragmatists like relevance. They'll listen to ideas if they're practical but may get impatient if there's a lot of discussion of theories which they see as too abstract. They like to try things out in practice and to get involved in activities.

Another way to look at learning styles is to consider how people prefer to take in information. There are a number of different models, but 3 main styles tend to be common – Visual, Auditory and Kinaesthetic.



Visual learners learn best through seeing visual stimuli. They may think in pictures and learn best from visual displays including diagrams, illustrated text books, overhead transparencies, videos, flipcharts and hand-outs.

Auditory learners learn best through listening.

They prefer verbal lectures, discussions, talking things through and listening to what others have to say. Auditory learners pay attention to tone of voice, pitch, speed and other nuances.

Kinaesthetic learners learn best through moving, doing and touching.

They prefer a hands-on approach, actively exploring the physical world around them. They may find it hard to sit still for long periods and may become distracted by their need for activity and exploration.



Of course, we all learn by using a blend of all three approaches, even if we may have a strong preference for one of them.

The two key points for trainers to bear in mind from all this are:

- we all learn through a variety of methods and using a range of senses

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- however, some people have preferred ways of learning and may struggle to learn effectively if the trainer's approach doesn't allow them to use their preferred method.

The danger, if you're a trainer, is that you'll assume that everyone else learns the same way that you do and you design and deliver training in a way which suits your own style.

For example, you may be the sort of person who really enjoys discussing ideas, talking about theories and the reasons behind things, looking at models which explain concepts. If so, you'll be tempted to include a lot of this sort of activity in any training you deliver.

But some of your participants may be people who prefer a very active or pragmatic approach. They may not enjoy, or benefit from, discussing theories or models. They may like very practical exercises, ideally ones where they can get involved, move around, do something physical and think about the practical application of what they're learning.

If those people are on one of your courses, and it's mainly discussion, theories and models, they'll be bored and will probably struggle to learn very much at all.

So effective trainers will design their training to suit more than one style of learner.

How can you do this? Here are some suggestions.

- encourage the use of as many senses as possible, including sight, sound and touch
- use powerful visual aids ( sorry, PowerPoint slides with words on don't count ) to support the learning and get participants to design their own visuals to record and recap key points – posters, mind maps, cartoons, diagrams
- use music as a background or get participants to make up songs to summarise what they've learned
- let people handle things as they learn, give people an opportunity to move around and be physically active
- break up the pace of the training and the way people work – include a mixture of activity, discussion, individual thought, group work
- have a balance between theoretical and practical aspects – use models and general concepts, discuss broad ideas but also look at practical applications, show the relevance of the learning

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- whenever groups engage in an activity, make sure you allow time to debrief it to draw out the key learning points
- allow time for individual reflection so people can think about the meaning of what they've learned for them as individuals and to make their own action plans

Never assume that everyone else learns in the same way that you do. Design your training to incorporate different approaches, even the ones which you don't like yourself, because these will appeal to other types of learners.

- **Top trainers maximise the transfer of learning.**



A common difficulty with training, especially classroom based training, is that the learning starts to fade as soon as people leave the room. Unless it is applied quickly, the impact is lost.

And a common criticism of training ( which isn't always valid ) is that it is too theoretical and not practical. It doesn't make a real difference to people's performances when they get back to work.

Put these two together and you have a problem – how can you try to make sure that any training actually has an impact back in the workplace?

Top trainers understand that any learning needs to be closely tied to practice and that learning only really takes place when behaviour changes. If people go on a course and then carry on behaving in the same way as before, what have they learned?

How can you make sure learning is transferred?

### **1. Know your group.**

Do some work before the training to find out about the participants and to start helping them to form links between the training and their work.

You need to know as much as you can about the people you're going to be training and the work they do.

If you work for the same organisation, that may be easy. If you're external or from a different department ( or even a full time internal trainer ) that may involve a bit more research.

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Talk to people, interview the participants if you can ( I know that's not always possible ) or at least send out questionnaires to ask people about what they do, what challenges they face and how they think the training will help them.

Also, if possible, get them to do something before the course to link it with their real situations. For example, if it's a Time Management course, ask them to fill in a time log, recording their activity over a day or longer. This will get them thinking in advance about the training and it will allow you to use real examples when they get there.



### **2. Use real – life examples.**

As I just said, use real examples from their working life to illustrate any points you make.

This is particularly crucial if you're using any theories or models, which people might see as irrelevant or divorced from their own lives.

If you're from the same organisation, or have the same background as them, you can use examples from your own experience to do this. This has the dual benefit of making the material real and also adding to your own credibility.

You can also ask them for their own examples. Talk about what they do, situations they have been in, challenges they have faced, successes they have had.

If you use a model of some sort, ask them straight away how they can see connections between this and the work they do. If they suggest it's not really relevant to them, ask them how it could be made more relevant. You could even ask them to redesign the model, or adapt the theory, to put it into their own language and root it in the situations they come across regularly.

Everything has to be as real and as relevant as possible.

### **3. Get other people involved from the organisation.**

For example, get some more senior people to come and talk about their experiences, the skills they think have made a difference to them, the ways they have applied the ideas covered on the course or what they're looking for from the people on the course.

If it's not practical to get people to come, interview them before the course and play the interviews as part of the training material. Failing that, ask the participants to find someone to talk to before the course and give them a list of questions to ask, then get them to report back.

#### **4. Regularly ask people what they're going to do with anything they've learned and what difference it will make to them.**

Action plans are sometimes dismissed because they tend to get put away after a course and never referred to again. But this is sometimes because they aren't seen as an integral part of the course, they're left until the end and seen a bit of a chore.

Allow time for individual reflection and for group and pair discussion as you go through the course so there is plenty of opportunity for people to think about what to do next. Get them to write down some goals and commit to them. You could pair people up and make them accountable to each other for what they do after the course.

#### **5. Follow up the course to help implementation.**

Following on from this, try to get involved in what happens next, or at least to set up supportive activities if you can.

For instance, you could send out follow - up questionnaires asking people how they have put ideas into practice or what difference the training has made to them.



Also, ask what barriers may have prevented them from putting these things into practice or what further support they need to help them.

This can help to show up any internal barriers in the organisation, such as lack of resources or management support, which have an impact on their performance. This is useful evidence if anyone suggests that your training hasn't made any difference when, in fact, the problem lies elsewhere.

If you can, arrange for the participants to meet someone else after the course, a manager or mentor perhaps, to discuss what they're got from the training and how to take things forward. This will encourage them to take their action plans seriously and it will get other people involved who might be able to help.

I realise that not all of these things will be possible but, if you can implement at least some of them, you'll have a much better chance of making your training relevant and of having a lasting impact, which, after all, is the whole point, isn't it?

- **Top trainers know how to choose exactly the right content.**

One of the main problems with many training courses or sessions is simply that there is far too much content.

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The best trainers know that "less is more". Many trainers cram in far too much material, mistakenly assuming that the more they cover the more people will learn. In fact, the reverse is true.

People need to be challenged but not overloaded. They need to be able to process what they've learned, they don't just soak it up like a sponge.

If you put a glass under a running tap, what happens? It fills up and overflows.

That's what happens to people's minds, quite literally. The part of the brain which takes in new information has a limited space. It needs to transfer the information into the short term memory to leave space. If there's too much information, and no opportunity to transfer it, some of it just gets lost.



To help people to learn effectively, you need to allow time for interaction, for discussion and for application. This is how the brain transfers the information (breaks also help in this). This takes a lot longer than just presenting information.

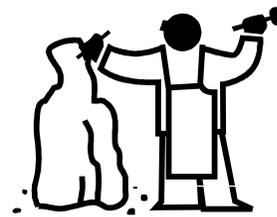
Trainers who try to cover too much cut down the time for interaction and slip into presentation mode to make sure they cover everything.

Top trainers understand that it is best to offer smaller amounts of information but to make sure that the learning sticks.

So how do you choose just the right content for any particular group or situation?

Well, here's a question - why is a trainer like a sculptor?

Let's say that a sculptor wants to produce an angel out of marble. He or she starts with a block of marble and starts to cut away anything which is not "angel". Eventually, much of the marble has been cut away and discarded and all that is left is pure angel.



In order to do this, the sculptor needs a very clear image of what the finished article is going to be. This image leads the sculptor to throw out some pieces of marble and to keep others.

Similarly, a trainer starts with a large block of potential content - all the possible information which he or she might put into a training session or course. The trainer's job is to start cutting away all the material which is not needed, to discard everything which is not part of the "angel" which he or she is making.

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And, like the sculptor, this means starting with a very clear image of what the outcome is going to be.

This is where some people come unstuck. They don't have this clear image. So they just hack away, almost at random, leaving in bits of content in case they might be useful. The end result is a bit like what you would get if a sculptor did that, leaving bits of marble attached in case they might be handy - a rather ugly mess.

So how do you decide what content to include?

Very briefly, here are the two things you absolutely need to know:

1. First, who are you training?

Who are they, why do they need this training, what do they already know? What knowledge or skills are they lacking?

2. Second, what are the objectives and outcomes for the training? What do you want the participants to think, feel and do at the end of it?

Most, if not all, learning involves:

- knowledge
- skills and
- attitude.

It is no use just trying to change one of these factors, they're all involved.

For example, if people acquire new information ( knowledge ) they will need to be able to apply it in some way for it to make a difference to them ( skills ). To do this, they need to be able to see the value of changing their behaviour and even of learning the information in the first place ( attitude ).

In some cases, the connection is quite clear. For example, if you're training people in customer service, you'll be dealing with:

- knowledge – information about how to deal with customers, what customers want, what techniques work best
- skills – how to handle customers, how to talk to them, how to apply the techniques covered
- attitude – developing a commitment to providing excellent customer service, to improving performance, to *want* to put the new skills into practice

Many training courses focus only on the knowledge which people will acquire at the end and not on the associated skills and attitudes. You need to think about all of them when you're looking at training objectives.

## How To Be A Top Trainer

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Once you're absolutely clear about who you're working with, what they need ( and why ) and what the objectives of the session are in terms of the knowledge, skills and attitudes you're trying to influence, you should be able to determine three levels of content:

1. the content which *must* be included in order for the session to be successful, i.e. to achieve its objectives
2. content which might be included if there is time or if people seem to need it, i.e. some additional information which may be useful but which is not essential. This is material which you can have " in your back pocket " in case it is needed, perhaps because you have to adapt the course when you find out more about the people who are attending
3. content which *must not* be included, it is not needed, in fact it will confuse matters if you include it. You have made a decision that these particular people do not need it at this point.

It's your job to be rigorous in selecting the material to include so that you do not waste people's time by giving them information which they don't need ( or already have ) or overload them with more than they can take in.

If you're finding it hard to make decisions about what to include and what to leave out, you're probably not clear enough about what the session is trying to achieve or about the needs of the people who will be attending.

- **Top trainers never blame their material, they bring the duller content to life.**



Excuse me while I have a " soapbox " moment.

There's a comment I've heard many times when running my Transform Your Training course and I always have to restrain myself from going, " Aaaaargh! " ( actually, sometimes I don't manage it ).

At some point a participant will say something along the lines of, " Well, it's hard training people on X because the material's so dull, it's such a boring topic "

Why does this annoy me so much? Because it's like the old saying, " A bad workman always blames his tools ". If you're a trainer, what do you think you're there for?

Top trainers never use this excuse, they know it's their job to make the material interesting.

## How To Be A Top Trainer

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It's your responsibility to take whatever raw material you have and turn it into something which helps people to learn. If the material is dull, it's up to you to liven it up.

I have every sympathy with people who try to do this but lack ideas or don't have the experience to know how to approach it, but I do lose patience with people who don't even see it as part of their role.

I've sat through talks and training sessions myself in the past where the person speaking has apologised at the start for the fact that it's going to be pretty boring. I feel like getting up and walking out - why stay if I'm going to be bored? Why give up my time if the person presenting the material hasn't even taken the trouble to try and make it interesting?



I used to train people in Tax and I still run courses for trainers who are going to deliver Tax material. I've come across some really imaginative and creative people who make what could be a dry subject interesting and entertaining.

I've seen really engaging training sessions on Pensions, Health and Safety, Financial Planning, Hygiene and lots of other topics which, on the face of it, might not seem all that promising.

The best trainers can take any material and turn it into something which grabs people attention, gets them involved and engaged, and help them to learn.



This doesn't mean you have to be an entertainer or a stand – up comedian. It means you have to design the training so it brings the subject to life and keeps the participants in a receptive state for learning.

How do you make these topics interesting? I've mentioned quite a few already in this report but here are a few ideas:

- use stories and anecdotes to give examples and bring the material to life, real ones from personal experience
- use humour, which can be through the stories but also through cartoons, pictures, unusual examples
- make sure the session is highly interactive - get people talking, asking questions, moving around, working together
- use visual aids ( NOT PowerPoint slides full of words, did I mention that? ), use pictures, props, graphs, diagrams, cartoons, DVDs – and get the participants to design their own
- use quizzes, games and group exercises as recaps

## How To Be A Top Trainer

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- make sure your own delivery is energetic and has impact, don't look as if you find the whole thing boring yourself
- always stress the benefit of learning the material, what people will be able to do with it and why that's important
- try to find a theme or metaphor for the session which will make people think differently about it, e.g. if you're training people in managing teams, base the whole thing around the metaphor of leading an orchestra

Remember - it's your job to make things interesting, anyone can deliver boring stuff.

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Well, there you have it, those are some of the ways to become a top trainer. If you can build these six principles into your own practice, I guarantee you'll be one of the best trainers around!

If you'd like to learn more about how to be an outstanding trainer, Alan Matthews is available to run a **Transform Your Training** course in – house for any business or organisation.

The courses are interactive, entertaining and fun but they also give you very practical tips on how to design and deliver effective and engaging training sessions. Whether you're a beginner or an experienced trainer, you'll take away new ideas to...well, transform your training.

**For more information about the Transform Your Training course, visit**  
<http://www.transformyourtraining.com/train-the-trainer/index.php>

***Alan Matthews***

**Transform Your Training**

Helping You Become An Outstanding Trainer

0121 249 1306

<mailto:alan@transformyourtraining.com>

<http://www.transformyourtraining.com>

# Transform Your Training

## The Complete Train The Trainer Programme

*“A thoroughly enjoyable and inspiring course where I believe we all will take a lot away with us to help us improve our training practices.”*

Mel Rice - Children and Young People's Services, Sheffield

**The Transform Your Training programme can cut the learning time for internal trainers dramatically**, giving them the skills they need to deliver training which is lively, interactive, memorable and effective.

Many Train the Train courses just cover basic techniques to help trainers to deliver content, such as presentation skills and how to use visual aids. These are important, but **this programme goes much further than that.**

**People who attend the full programme will learn how to:**

- **facilitate learning**, not just present information
- **manage learners' "states "** throughout a course or session to keep them involved and engaged
- **adapt their approach** when necessary to suit the circumstances and the group they work with
- **use discussion and activities** to help learners to process what they have learned - learning is about " creation, not consumption"
- **maximise the transfer of learning** from the training room back to the workplace
- deliver training which **appeals to different learning styles** so everyone learns effectively
- **liven up potentially dull information** so that it becomes interesting and engaging training material
- **help participants learn more quickly and easily** and remember what they have learned long after the training.

In many cases, participants will also have the chance to **deliver a short session themselves and receive direct feedback** to help them to assess their strengths and areas for development, with practical tips to help them.

The final length and content of the programme will depend on your exact needs and the number of participants, but it can vary from 1- 4 days.

For full details, please visit  
[www.transformyourtraining.com/train-the-trainer/index.php](http://www.transformyourtraining.com/train-the-trainer/index.php)  
or call **Alan Matthews** on **0121 249 1306**.