

UNIT EIGHT - TRAINING TECHNIQUES FOR THE ADULT LEARNER

INTRODUCTION

Tell me, I forget. Show me, I remember. Involve me, I understand. Eureka!
(An Ancient Chinese Proverb)

The American Heritage Dictionary defines training as:

Train:

1. To coach in, or accustom to, some mode of behavior or performance.
2. To make proficient with specialized instruction and practice.
3. To prepare physically, as with a regimen, make fit.

This points out that when you are training a new or experienced driver, you are endeavoring to make them proficient and fit as a school bus driver by modifying their behavior and performance.

Modifying their behavior is best accomplished with effective two-way communication. Some techniques that may help you achieve effective communication is what this unit is about.

CLASSROOM

Most school bus drivers are entering the classroom for the first time since their secondary or post-secondary schooling. Adult learners bring with them unique experiences and often, fears of the classroom environment. Many older adults have an anxiety about testing situations, past failures in an academic setting, and the belief that the ability to learn declines with age. They may even view driver training as an implication that the driving skills they have acquired and improved are flawed. This feeling fosters resistance to training.

The adult learner may express concern about memory loss. The greatest problems with memory and older adults arise when they are presented with what they perceive as meaningless information they may not be motivated to retain, or material that is inconsistent with previously held beliefs.

On the whole, adults can be expected to learn material that includes extensive memorization if several factors are considered; motivation, desire to learn the materials, relevance of the material, reduction of anxiety associated with the classroom setting, and physical environmental factors.

Adults cannot be forced to learn. You, the trainer, are a “facilitator of learning.” You must present the program in a manner that provides each trainee the best chance of successfully completing the training.

It is essential to recognize the importance of the learning environment as it affects learner outcome. Adults typically benefit more from “hands-on” learning and working with peer groups. Some of your training will be structured as a lecture or in a classroom setting, so it is important to arrange the room in a way that enhances the learning environment.

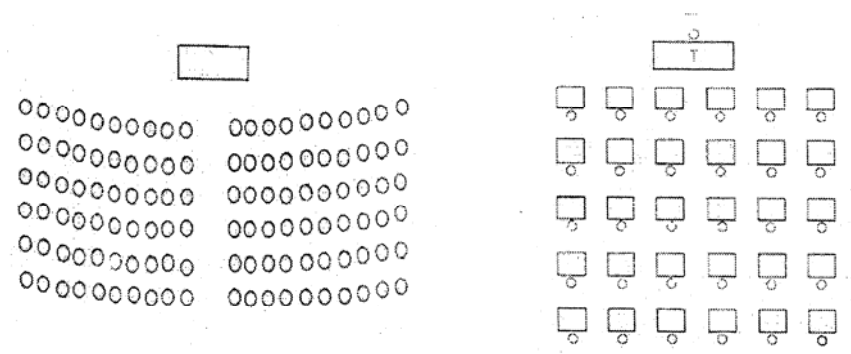
When arranging the classroom, keep in mind that the adult learner may have diminished vision or hearing. Be sure that the lighting is adequate for participants. Eliminate or reduce outside noises that may distract or interfere with hearing. Smaller rooms are better than larger rooms because of the sound reflection.

Classroom Designs - Tables may be a desirable setting for adult learners. They provide a convenient writing surface as well as a place to set a coffee cup or other beverage container. In addition, sitting at a table provides a certain feeling of “safety.” It conceals more than half of the participant’s body which may allow the person to be less self-conscious and thus able to focus more easily on what is being taught.

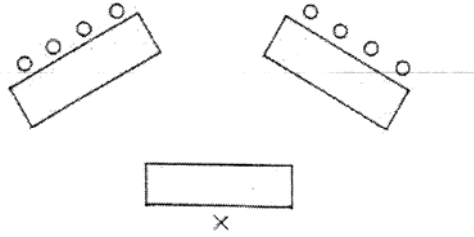
Chairs can also be used effectively to create a desired atmosphere. To design the classroom appropriately, consider:

- Size of the room
- Equipment availability
- Number of participants
- Structure of the presentation
- Desired interaction with the group

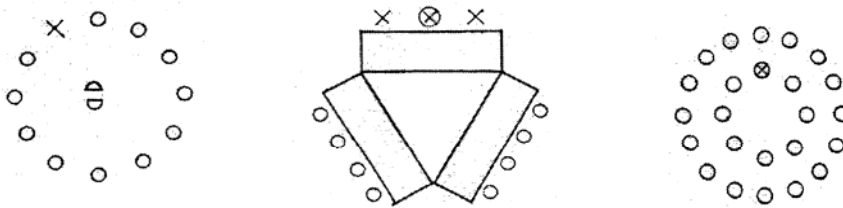
For a formal presentation or a lecture, you may want to design the room in a structured manner that does not encourage discussion, questions or interaction of the participants during the class. This can be accomplished by arranging the tables, desks or chairs in a series of rows.



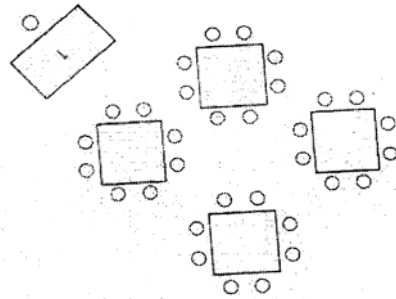
Placing desks, tables or chairs at an angle, can create a more relaxed atmosphere. This arrangement can still be conducive to a lecture, but encourages more participation from the trainees.



By placing the seating arrangement in a circle, you can create the feeling of interaction among the participants. This is a very relaxed mode of teaching but can make the use of teaching aids difficult.



Arranging the seating and or tables in small groups creates interaction among the groups and encourages team playing. This style is great for projects and teaching problem-solving . Each group can be working on the same topic or on different topics.



Tips for maintaining an effective classroom environment:

By Randy McLerran, Oklahoma State Transportation Director.

- Avoid the use of chalkboards
- Arrange the tables and chairs for the appropriate teaching style
- Provide coffee and soft drinks or allow them to be brought into the classroom
- Eliminate auditory distractions as much as possible
- Provide a well-lighted classroom
- Use multi-sensory teaching aides
- Dress appropriate to the students
- Smile a lot

- Operate on a first name basis whenever possible
- Avoid “canned” presentations
- Start on time and end on time
- Allow students to move around the room during class
- Provide frequent breaks
- Keep moving; do not stand behind a podium
- Make eye contact with everyone
- Learn names the first session, and then call them by their name or nickname
- The opening session sets the tone for the course
- Have fun!!!

TRAINING AIDS

The use of training aids in a classroom setting can add a great deal to your presentation or class discussion, and they can be great learning tools. The different types of training aids can be divided into two main types:

Projected and Real Life - Projected aids use an image on the screen or monitor of the subject such as slides, overheads, or video. Real-life aids use a three dimensional representation to support the subject. This may include a cut-a-way sample of a transmission or brake chamber, or the bus itself.

The objective of both aids is to support or assist your presentation, not to be your presentation. Aids can greatly enhance the driver’s understanding of the subject, but it can also detract or even ruin your training. The key is being flexible. If one type of aid doesn’t work, try others, or go without any aids.

Projected Aids - The use of an overhead projector can help create a central focus on the subject as well as graphically-display pictures, maps, and other materials to enhance the learning process. When using an overhead projector during a presentation, point to the display on the projector, not the screen. Do not turn your back to the audience. Also, remember to turn the projector off when changing displays or when it is not needed. The bright light can distract the participants. Transparencies can be easily made on most copiers and laser printers. Check your owner’s manual. Adding color enhances this type of aid.

Another widely used aid is the flip chart. This is a great tool for emphasizing bullet thoughts as well as writing down ideas in problem-solving sessions. A flip chart is good for encouraging class participation during the presentation of material.

The video is one of the most popular uses of projected aids. Videos can be an effective tool for your training program. When using a pre-made video program, be familiar with the video and know where you can stop the action for discussion, or emphasize a certain point and relate how it

applies to your drivers. A lot of valuable information can be obtained from the use of videos.

You can develop your own training video with just a camcorder. One method is to record the title drawing on paper then record the different scenes in sequence. Another less formal method is to record the scenes you want, without titles, or audio, and just discuss what is viewed.

Power Point is a highly-effective computer training aid. You can customize your own presentation to fit your individual program.

DVD's and interactive mediums may also be used.

Real Life Training Aids - This type of training aid is limited only by your own imagination and budget. Examples include: cut-away models, brake system display boards, magnetic cars on a metal board, or lifting the bus on a hoist to see the underside. Hands-on training is highly effective.

A fun change of pace in the use of training aids is role-playing. Create a scenario and have two or three class members play the parts while the others critique. Use experienced drivers or staff members to interact with new drivers in the role-play. You can have the same situation or a different situation played out by the class members, giving everyone a chance to role-play and critique. It is important to establish positive norms for the group that is critiquing. This can be effective in developing student management skills.

Use what is available to you. Be creative. Create your own aids.

Other Resources: Vehicle maintenance personnel, web sites, police, Colorado State Patrol, firemen, hospitals, railroad authorities, highway department, school resource officer, school principal, insurance agents, vendors, and Administrator's Reference Manual.

A smile is also an excellent visual aid.

SKILLS MANEUVERS

Training the technical maneuvers has become an important part of school bus driving since the implementation of the Commercial Drivers License (CDL) program. Some of the training can be introduced in a classroom setting with the use of drawings that position the vehicle correctly to accomplish the maneuver. This can also help participants visualize the pivot points and reference points used by the driver. Different techniques work for different people. Some learn by simply telling them how to position the bus to accomplish the maneuver. Others will need to walk through the process step by step while you are directing them in what they are looking for on each step. Sometimes the best way to present the maneuver is to let the trainee watch the maneuver being performed. You or another person can perform the maneuver while they watch. If you are fortunate enough to have a third person to perform the maneuver, you can explain the process while they watch the maneuver being done. This is a

good team-teaching tool and can also be used to explain the process to a small group.

ON THE ROAD

Training the new driver on the road or sharpening the skills of the veteran driver can be both very rewarding and challenging. A positive and friendly attitude as well as a quiet and calm demeanor are a must. One of the greatest challenges can be to make the driver feel comfortable by relieving some of the anxiety s/he may be experiencing. Light conversation such as encouraging them to talk about themselves can create this atmosphere.

Taking frequent breaks and learning to recognize when the driver is stressed can help them achieve success. When you sense the driver is tired or stressed about performing a certain skill or series of skills, lighten the conversation, find a place to stop and get out and stretch. If you feel the driver is resentful or negative to what you are asking them to do, encourage them to express their opinion. Be ready to give a positive reason for the request.

Give positive reinforcement for good driving skills. For instance, "That was a great right turn." If the trainee is having difficulty with a certain maneuver or skill, be encouraging and positive in how you describe the problem. For example, "I noticed you have some difficulty with..." State the problem, followed by a positive suggestion on how they can improve their skill.

Language can be very important when giving directions to the driver (i.e., "Turn right here," **WRONG!** Clearer directions might be, "At the next intersection I would like you to turn right"). An important phrase to use when asking the driver to perform a driving maneuver is: "When you think it is safe to do so, please.. " Try to give directions as far in advance as necessary and speak in a calm voice. Startling the driver may cause them to do something unsafe.

Some drivers get almost too comfortable with the vehicle or become complacent. For instance, they may turn corners a little too fast, not slow down for bumps in the road, or brake too hard. A good technique is to take the wheel and have them sit in the back of the bus while you mirror their driving habits. They soon recognize how the students feel. Passenger comfort may greatly increase rapport between the driver and students. This technique works for all new trainees as well as veteran drivers who have become too comfortable with the bus.

THE MOTIVATING TRAINER

Training is a learned skill. With practice and feedback from peers and participants, every trainer can improve in the ability to demonstrate each of the four characteristics of a motivating trainer:

- Expertise

- Empathy
- Enthusiasm
- Clarity

Characteristics of a Motivating Trainer:

1. Expertise - The trainer with expertise in the subject matter is confident in the knowledge of the subject matter and easily develops credibility with learners. Thorough knowledge of a topic gives a trainer confidence and enables flexibility and creativity in working with learners. Only when one thoroughly knows a content area can the focus be on the needs of the learners with resulting spontaneity and improvisation. A trainer tied to notes or a manual cannot “read” the learners and respond to their nonverbal cues.
2. Empathy - An empathetic trainer is aware of the adult learners’ needs and expectations, adapts the instruction to the learners’ levels of experience and skill development, and continuously considers the learners’ perspective. Adult learners know when their trainer is in touch with them, and they are motivated by demonstrations of empathy.
3. Enthusiasm - Trainers who are enthusiastic care about and value their subject matter and show their feelings for what they teach. They become salespersons and advocates for their content area. They show their emotion, are energetic, and present their content with animation. Enthusiastic trainers are believable because of their commitment to, and involvement with, their subject matter.
4. Clarity - Clarity of instruction is teaching something in a way that is easy for learners to understand. It is organized in an orderly and logical fashion. Adults cannot learn what they cannot understand. A rule of thumb is if the presentation outline is clear to the trainer, most learners will be able to follow it also. Since adults have different learning styles, teaching with clarity implies that various instructional methods are used so that all learners can follow the training.

MAKING HUMOR WORK

“You don’t have to teach people to be funny. You only have to give them permission.” Dr. Harvey Mindes

Humor is an expression of the freedom of the human spirit. It comes from one’s ability to stand outside of a situation and view the whole scene, the things beyond control, the unexpected, and the incongruities. Every trainer can make humor work in training by developing a unique style of humor and using it to enhance the training experience.

Some suggestions for making humor work:

1. Take your job as a trainer seriously and yourself lightly. Be willing to laugh at yourself.

2. Humor is working when you laugh with your participants, not at them.
3. Avoid sarcastic humor. Rather than bringing people together, it tears them apart and is never appropriate.
4. Avoid ethnic humor or humor that “puts down” any individual or group. It is never appropriate.
5. Relate any humorous story or joke to the training topic. Ask “Does it work?” rather than just, “Is it funny?” Humor consultants suggest using a humor sandwich. Tell the point you want to make, then give it back as a humorous story that illustrates the point. Finally, provide the other side of the sandwich by restating the content point.
6. Use the KISS approach to humor. Keep it Short and Simple! The average length of a story or joke is about 15 seconds. It has been said that “Brevity is the soul of wit.”
7. Work at the set-up and the punch line. The “facts” of the story should be logical and believable. Personalize stories with names of people and places. Control the set-up and punch the punch line.
8. When telling a funny story, master the pause. Give your participants time to visualize the story and grasp the situation so the punch line will be even funnier.
9. Practice your funny stories just as you practice every other part of your presentation.

“Humor is such a great gift--why leave it to chance?” Joel Goodman

Practice. Use your own creative humor to finish these sentences...

“You know it’s going to be a bad day when...”

“...you drive up to the training site and the doors are locked and there is no one to be seen.”

“Don’t you hate it when...”

“...the air conditioning is off and the windows won’t open in the training room?”

TIPS FOR RESPONDING TO QUESTIONS

In any training session the trainer is not the only one who gets to ask a question, and that’s good. Questions from drivers show their interest and keep them actively involved.

1. Be prepared for the types of questions that may be asked. Make notes in your outline of questions that could be asked about the content you are presenting.

2. Repeat the question to the group when it is asked. This helps to make sure everyone heard the question, and it lets you be sure you heard it correctly.
3. Answer the question, don't avoid or evade it. If the answer will come later in the training, say so.
4. If you don't know the answer, admit it. Offer to respond to the person with the answer later (and then do it).
5. Make sure the drivers know that the only "bad" question is the one that they had, but did not ask. Don't laugh at or make fun of anyone's question.
6. You may want to let another driver in the session answer the question, particularly if it is an opinion question or a question with many correct answers. This keeps all drivers involved.
7. Use the 25-75% Rule. When answering the question, direct 25% of your eye contact to the person who asked it, and 75% to the rest of the drivers. This again, keeps everyone involved in the question and answer process.

TIPS FOR ASKING QUESTIONS

1. Use the Ask-Pause-Call technique. Ask the question, pause a few seconds, then call on someone by name to answer it.
2. If the driver has trouble answering the question, "coach" for the correct answer. Coaching means helping the driver answer correctly. Give clues and hints, or break the question down into smaller questions.
3. Make sure all participants have an opportunity to answer questions.
4. "Dignify" any incorrect answers the drivers may give. In other words, help them avoid embarrassment when they tried but did not answer correctly. Remember, it is your responsibility as the trainer to make sure that the correct answer is provided so all can hear.

Examples of responses to coach for the correct answer:

- "That was a good try."
 - "Yes, you're getting close."
5. Ask open questions to encourage the participants to think and to find out what they know. An open question requires the person to explain what has been learned. Such a question cannot be answered "yes" or "no," or with one word.

Examples of open questions:

- What are some student management techniques for misbehaving students?

- What are some rules for driving in mountainous terrain?
6. Motivate with positive language.
- Be specific. Saying “I appreciate the great work you did preparing that report,” is better than merely saying “good job.”
 - Use the team member’s name. Everyone appreciates hearing his or her name linked to something positive. Saying, “Pat, thanks for coming in early to prepare for the meeting,” packs a big punch.
 - Capitalize on compliments. Trying to balance a compliment by offering one of your own diminishes the value of the compliment you received. Instead, say “Thanks for noticing. You’ve made my day.”
7. The creativity connection.
- The four most important words you can use to spur creativity are “What do you think?” Inviting team members to share their opinions can pay off big.
 - Encourage trainees to build on one another’s ideas.
 - Avoid negatives by substituting the word “opportunity” for “problem” every time you communicate.
 - Total honesty - Make sure trainees feel free to say what they think – no politics or no game playing. Encourage everyone to express his/her views and to contribute his/her beliefs.
 - Total amnesty - Avoid any repercussions for things said. It is the only way you can be sure trainees really feel free to speak their minds.