

Education vs Training

Training is about learning for living, not learning to pass. Training is not knowledge alone—it's about applying knowledge and skills to get results.

ARTICLE | MON, 06/06/2011 - 01:00

By Bob Pike

Are you a trainer—or an educator—and why is the difference so critical?

I once was asked to be the opening keynote speaker at a national conference for people who trained first responders: emergency medical technicians, paramedics, etc. As I prepared for the presentation, I asked this question: “Is there anything I need to be particularly sensitive to—topics, vocabulary, etc?”

The response was, “Yes, do not use the word, ‘trainer.’ Our attendees are called educators, not trainers.”

That answer set up my entire presentation. I started by saying, “I’m a trainer. Let me explain why I am a trainer, and not an educator. Perhaps you’ll want to be a trainer, too.” I went on to explain that I had taught graduate courses at three universities and that never once had I been responsible for students passing my courses. My job is to teach the course. Your job is to pass the course. If you do not pass the course, it is not my fault. I can prove that I covered everything needed to pass from my lesson plans. You just did not learn it.

This may sound harsh—and perhaps it is not always true. And it’s certainly not how I really felt about my students. But as far as the universities went, it was the technical reality. The way that I differentiate education from training is that training is about learning for living, not learning to pass.

Too many students in academic settings cruise all semester long and then three days before finals, they start cramming. They grab the exam, go through it, and then reach a question where they think to themselves: “I know where that is. I highlighted it in yellow. I remember where it was, but I can’t remember what it is!”

Now imagine. A week later, the instructor walks into class and says, “Somehow your exams were lost. So this hour you’ll be retaking the exam.” What do you think the reaction would be of the average student? Do you think they’d be elated at having a second chance? Do you think that right after the exam they looked up all the things they were unsure of? Or do you think there’d be panic?

Now think about our own training—training that is learning for living instead of learning to pass. Can you imagine finishing a class—especially one where certification is involved—where students say, “Quick, test me right now. I know it now. I may not know it tomorrow or in a week, but I know it right now!” That’s not good enough.

Training is about applying knowledge and skills to get results. It is not knowledge alone. As a trainer, if you haven’t caught it, I haven’t taught it. Training is a partnership. My job is to inspire, empower, and equip you to get results.

So what can you do? Here are six things you can begin doing now—if you’re not already:

1. Start thinking about what you can do before people even attend training to help them get the most out of the training. After all, training should be an investment—not a cost. This includes getting managers involved in the preparation phase so participants realize their manager supports the training.
2. Make sure people understand the purpose for them attending the training—before they come. Make sure they’ve looked at the course outline, etc. You want them attending as learners—not prisoners or vacationers.
3. In addition to setting course objectives, have each participant set learning goals. This way, they each have a personal WIIFM (What’s In It For Me?) for the class.
4. During class, allow time for reflection and action planning. Let them think about: What have I learned? How can I use it on the job?
5. Make sure your training is instructor-led, but participant-centered. The more involved attendees are in the learning process, the more memory anchors are created. Provide experiences whenever possible rather than lecture. Remember my EAT model: Provide an Experience, which creates Awareness. Finally, the Theory cements the learning.
6. Make sure each attendee’s manager is prepared for a post-training debrief and is committed to helping their participants implement their action plans.

Have a question you’d like Bob to answer? E-mail him at BPike@BobPikeGroup.com.

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