

Stop

An October 1995 FaxForum survey in *Training & Development* revealed that 100 percent of respondents used training games, and 76 percent used them in all or most of their programs. This popularity shows no sign of waning.

But we wondered: As trainers are increasingly required to justify their existence and their expenses, and to demonstrate return-on-investment, has the use of games in training changed over the last few years?

Call it
action learning,
a team activity, or
a Modified Delphi
Technique, but make
sure that your game
suits your audience
and supports
learning
objectives.

The answer is yes. In fact, Sivasailam Thiagarajan, principal of Workshops by Thiagi in Bloomington, Indiana, says that trainers are using experiential activities more than ever. Why? "Because games lend themselves to Level 4 evaluations," he says. Activities are more tightly linked to learning objectives and are tailored to both the audience and the subject matter.

"A game is part of bringing an interesting environment to the learner that is user-friendly," says Steve Sugar of The Game Group in Ellicott City, Maryland, and author of *Games That Teach*.

Sugar calls games "fun with a purpose." He says that trainers miss an opportunity if they don't use all available tools to bring about learning with impact.

"Most required training is dull and boring," says Bob Preziosi, professor of management education in the Graduate School of Business at Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale. "You need all the help you can get."

Carolyn Nilson, author of *More Team Games for Trainers* (McGraw-Hill, 1998), takes those thoughts further: "Games have come into their own as learning tools," she says. "They're no longer just a diver-

sion. If employee empowerment is the movement of the nineties, then games are the tools that support it."

What is a training game? In the July 1998 issue of his newsletter, *Thiagi Game Letter*, Thiagi offers the following critical characteristics:

- ❑ Conflict. Players have a goal to achieve and different obstacles that prevent them from achieving it.
- ❑ Control. The rules of the game that specify how to take your turn, make your moves, and receive the consequences.
- ❑ Closure. The game has to come to an end. The termination rule specifies when and how the game

Playing

By Jennifer J. Salopek

ends and may involve time limits, target scores, or elimination.

- ❑ Contrivance. The built-in inefficiencies of the game. The characteristic of contrivance is what makes people say, "After all, it was only a game."
- ❑ Competency. The specific skill areas that the game is designed to improve.

To understand how to use team activities effectively in your training sessions, think like an investigative reporter and answer the following questions:

- ❑ Who?
- ❑ What?
- ❑ When?
- ❑ Where?

Games

- How?
- Why?

Who

Adult learners tend to fall into one of three categories: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. Jim Wilcox, a training performance coach at AchieveGlobal in Tampa, divides kinesthetic learners further into two subgroups: hands-on people, who need only their hands occupied to respond to the learning, and whole-body people, who require more physical engagement to get in touch with the material.

An awareness of your participants and an understanding of their needs and learning styles are vital to using training games effectively, says Thiagi. “Your activity must fit your participants. In Asia, trainees often complain about the lack of privacy in team activities. Be aware of the various dimensions of your activity. If it requires a lot of self-disclosure, you must adjust quickly.”

“Have you ever seen an instructor evaluation form that said, ‘I wish there were more lecture’? I haven’t,” says Bob Pike, president and CEO of Creative Training Techniques International in Minneapolis. “Training has moved from the one-size-fits-all approach of lecture-based training to training that caters to each person’s learning style.”

According to Pike, some learners prefer specific structure for their learning to occur while others prefer a more general structure. As a result, CTT develops activities that provide participants with clear structure and a choice of activities so they can decide how to fulfill their objectives.

You’re now training the Nintendo generation, Thiagi reminds, and these learners have no patience for lecture. The most effective games, he says, are designed for cross-cultural and cross-functional groups that are capable of multitasking and don’t withhold feedback.

Sugar feels that people are more outspoken these days and like to express their views. “Games can be a vehicle to allow people to show excitement,” he says. “They appeal to the child in us.”

Pike suggests providing a variety of learning environments, including small and large groups. A participant-centered training approach can help learners develop their own answers,

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rather than lecturing answers to them. “By tapping their own resources, tools, techniques, reference materials, and the resources of their colleagues, participants are able to reach solutions that work in the training session as well as on the job, when the trainer is not present,” says Pike.

To tailor your game to your audience, you have to know the intellectual and educational level of your participants and write your content to that level, says Sugar. James K. Kirk, an associate professor of HRD at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, North Carolina, agrees. In his August 1997 Training 101 column, “Playing Games Productively,” he writes: “Games require participants to have some knowledge of the game’s content, some communication and elementary math skills, and some understanding of how games are played.... If participants don’t have the requisite knowledge or skills for playing a particular game, they will want to quit long before the game is over.”

You should also know as much as you can about the trainees’ jobs, says Diane Valenti, principal of Training Solutions in San Francisco. She observes that salespeople, for instance, seem to be more competitive as a group than engineers. She suggests that you select your games to suit participants’ styles.

Another facet of the *Who?* question is you. Kirk writes: “Is the game appropriate for the facilitator? Games differ in sophistication. Complex games require a facilitator who is well versed on the content of the game and in the art of game facilitation. [Trainers] must also be able to facilitate emotionally charged group discussions.”

Thiagi recommends that you tailor your activities to suit your own style as well. Not every trainer is an extrovert, and not everyone will feel comfortable

with games at first. Thiagi emphasizes that although “you may believe that your job is to give information, you must also realize that another important part is to allow trainees to work with that information.”

To address any fears you may have about the appropriateness of using games in your training, Sugar suggests the following tips:

- Use a game that’s tried and true, and almost guaranteed not to fail, such as a scavenger hunt.
- Watch other trainers facilitate games, and learn about organizations that promote the use of games, such as the North American Simulation and Gaming Association, www.nasaga.org.
- Read books and newsletters to find ready-to-use games.
- Play the game with friends, and become familiar with the variations that can occur.

George Takacs, principal of Takacs Techniques in Largo, Maryland, encourages you to be as flexible as possible in your facilitation style. “Your stated objective may not be what participants really need to know,” he says. He urges trainers to push their own comfort envelopes: “You can have a nice, happy day,” he says, “or you can get to the real learning.”

How do you know whether you’re the type to lead training games? Preziosi says that a good gamesperson

- has a world-class sense of humor
- is extroverted
- is creative
- is casual and relaxed
- develops trust with participants
- has excellent facilitation skills
- is flexible and good at “transitioning.”

If you’re still a little nervous, heed this advice from Sugar: “You’re taking a risk anyway when you stand up to train. A game may add risk, but it also adds fun.” Further, he says, most people want you to succeed and want to help you. “Don’t focus on the 10 percent that don’t,” he says.

What

Nilson defines a game as a “structured activity with learning at the end.” She notes a current demand for learning devices that support organizational learning and process development, adding that “people need ways to expand their

creativity and to push that creativity forward.” She cites these characteristics of a successful game:

- provides a simple, single-purpose activity related to work that focuses the participants
- incorporates careful planning for on-the-job application of the learning
- provides just-in-time training
- is carefully interwoven into the training session
- uses a procedure that’s short and clear; ideally, only two to four steps.

Training Solutions’s Valenti groups games into these categories:

- Self-teaching. For simple content that must be memorized.
- Review. Used at the end of the session; often include an element of luck as well as skill.
- A-ha! Back learners into the content, for times when “self-realization will be powerful.” In these games, which Valenti often uses to teach product knowledge, learners aren’t given any information up front. Instead, knowledge is gained through moving pieces on a board, reading cards, and so forth. Preziosi calls the three categories presentation, reinforcement, and diagnostic, but the intent is generally the same as Valenti’s.

The types of games that fall into those categories are numerous. Thiagi notes that there are more than 6,500 published icebreakers alone. You can buy packaged games or create your own.

Madelyn Callahan, author of the *Info-line* “10 Great Games and How to Use Them,” offers this game selection checklist:

- What is your purpose for using the game? What should it communicate to the group?
- What is the game’s central focus? How does it serve your learning goals?
- How large is the group? What are their backgrounds? Are they familiar with the training material? With each other?
- Is the game adaptable to the needs of your training program? Can you use it to introduce, demonstrate, or reinforce the training?
- How “playable” is the game? Try it. How is it organized? Does it work according to its instructions? Is it fun?
- Do you have the resources and facilities for the game?

□ Is this game the best method for achieving your objectives?

Your budget and familiarity with the market will often determine whether you purchase a game or create your own. However, you can also create the game with the help of the participants. In the March 1998 issue of *Thiagi Game Letter*, Thiagi writes: “I have always thought that the people who learn the most from an instructional game are its designers! Why should the game designers be the only ones to benefit? Why not share with the learners?”

Thiagi offers these tips to lead learners in designing an instructional game:

- Ask the participants to read a technical manual and design a game to review its contents.
- Give the participants a half-finished game, and ask them to complete it.
- Describe the framework for a game, and ask the participants to create the necessary game materials.
- Provide a template for a simulation game, and ask the participants to design their own games.
- Give the trainees a children’s game board, and have them use it to design a training game on the day’s topic.
- Play a few rounds of a popular trivia game, such as Trivial Pursuit, then ask participants to generate suitable question cards related to their topic.

Furthermore, be flexible, and adapt games as necessary. Thiagi says, “Good trainers play *within* the rules of the game. Excellent facilitators play *with* the rules of the game.”

When

There are two aspects to the *When?* question: the material being covered and the actual placement of the activity during the training session. Both aspects must be considered carefully for the activity to be successful.

Subject matter. Without exception,

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the experts interviewed for this article said that there is no topic area that is in appropriate for the use of a game, as long as the game is evaluated and selected carefully. Think of the game not as a trivializing experience but as an interactive and experiential way to deal with sensitive, emotional topics,” says Thiagi. More appropriate to the question of whether to incorporate a game is its relevance, he says.

Sugar agrees. “Almost every topic can be incorporated into a learning game,” he says, “and can lighten a heavy atmosphere without trivializing the topic.” Takacs adds, “Be very careful in your choice of exercises for sensitive topics. You don’t want to create a situation that inadvertently reinforces the behavior you’re trying to eliminate.”

Technical versus soft-skills subject matter is also a consideration, but not one that should deter you for long. “More and more technical trainers are using games,” says Preziosi. “They make dry material more interesting and help people remember.”

For technical-skills training, Thiagi recommends simulations—not the computer-based kind we often think of but activities that reflect their real-world counterparts. When objects and processes are reproduced faithfully, the result is a high-fidelity simulation, such as flight training or drivers’ education. A low-fidelity simulation would be one in which engineers build bridges with Lego blocks. In either case, the bottom line is transfer of learning in a cheap, safe environment that allows for repeated practice and continuous feedback, according to Thiagi.

Timing. The seamless integration of learning games and activities into your training session is the linchpin upon which success turns. “You can’t just drop a game on learners out of the sky,” says Preziosi. “You must have a smooth transition into the game or activity.”

Thiagi recommends that you slide in and out of activities, essentially delivering a series of interactive lectures. “The less trainers talk, the more participants learn,” he says. He thinks you should devote 50 percent of training time to having participants *do* something. Sugar thinks activities should be half of any learning module. But he

cautions, “Keep them short, and know that you can expand.”

Valenti adds this tip: “People will be difficult if the game makes them feel dumb or if you put high-risk activities too close to the beginning of the session. Allow participants time to get comfortable with each other and with you.”

Wilcox says that games should be strategically placed content-wise, as well as when you think participants will need a break. He also thinks that games later in the day are more successful when participants are “ramped-up” and have built rapport. He especially likes using a game-show approach at the end of the day. “It’s a huge energizer,” he says, “and gives participants a chance

to demonstrate what they’ve learned.” Sugar and Takacs both recommend games and activities right after lunch—the time block Takacs calls the “graveyard of trainers.”

Where

“Games sometimes require a lot of space, computer equipment, or props,” Kirk writes. “It’s important to check whether such resources will be available when and where you want to play the game.”

Callahan writes: “Start by choosing a room that will accommodate your group comfortably. Check the noise level inside and outside the building. Prepare seating arrangements in ad-

vance. [And] test acoustics and audiovisual equipment.”

Cater to those whole-body learners Wilcox mentioned by getting participants out of their chairs. “As instructors, we’re all moving around and forget what it’s like to be sitting all day,” says Richard Meiss, a senior training consultant at CTT. It’s important to relieve the class with fun props and activities. For instance, Meiss has groups of four to six people create team charts with their names, logos, and mottoes and post them on the wall. After that, each team member is asked to write one class objective or outcome on a Post-it Keynote and put it on the team chart for reference at the session’s end. This activity gets partici-

Games People Play

Action Learning involves a combination of action and reflection by a team, solving complex, strategic problems in a real-world organizational setting. Team members apply existing skills and knowledge and create new skills, knowledge, and insight through continuously reflecting on and questioning the problem definition, the collaborative behavior, and the ensuing results.

Board Games borrow structures and supplies from popular recreational games to create highly motivating training events. Board games typically use game cards and dice to encourage individuals and teams to demonstrate their mastery of concepts, principles, skills, and problem-solving strategies.

Card Games involve pieces of information (such as facts, concepts, technical terms, definitions, principles, examples, quotations, and questions) printed on cards. These games borrow procedures from traditional games with playing cards, and they require players to classify and sequence pieces of information from the instructional content.

Case Studies involve a written account of a real or fictional situation surrounding a problem. Participants work individually and in teams to analyze, discuss, and recommend appropriate solutions and to critique each other’s work. In some cases, the facilitator may recount actual decisions implemented in the real-world

situation on which the case was based. Cash Games are a special type of simulation that involve actual cash transactions. However, they are not gambling games, nor do they focus on accounting procedures or financial management. Instead, they explore interpersonal skills (such as negotiation) and concepts (such as cooperation). Why cash? Because it simulates the real world effectively and brings out natural behaviors and emotions in participants.

Computer Game Shells are a special type of framegame (see explanation further on) that is presented on a computer screen. The shells permit the loading of new content (usually questions) by the facilitator. The computer acts as a timekeeper and scorekeeper. These games can also be presented to large groups by projecting the display on large screens.

Creativity Techniques provide a structure that enables participants to solve a problem or to use an opportunity in a creative fashion. These techniques are useful not only for learning new skills and knowledge, but also for improving team performance.

Experiential Learning involves physical activities and challenges (such as sailing, rafting, rappelling, rock climbing, exploring wilderness areas, and walking on rope bridges) in specially designed indoor or outdoor environments. Participants construct knowledge, skill, and value from their

direct experience through debriefing discussions.

Facilitated Activities help teams analyze problems, formulate goals, generate alternative solutions, and make decisions. Usually, a trained facilitator conducts these structured activities to help teams maximize their diverse talents and to arrive at collaborative solutions that are superior to individual solutions.

Framegames provide templates for the instant creation of training games. The generic frameworks are designed to permit easy replacement of old content with new. You can use framegames to rapidly develop training activities that suit your needs.

Guided Learning Activities provide a special type of on-the-job training. New employees (or new members of a team) observe workplace processes using carefully designed checklists. Later, they perform job-related activities under the guidance of an experienced employee or team member and receive immediate feedback.

Instructional Puzzles challenge participants’ ingenuity and incorporate training content that is to be previewed, reviewed, tested, re-taught, or enriched. Puzzles can be solved by individuals or teams.

Interactive Lectures involve participants in the learning process while providing complete control to the instructor. These activities enable

pants talking and learning together.

Your physical whereabouts are also important. Callahan urges, "Don't distance yourself from trainees. Share breaks and meals with them to show them you are part of the group."

Another part of the *Where?* is the type of event during which the games will be played. Event-based facilitation activities can take place during

- annual meetings
- board meetings
- ceremonies
- company picnics
- inaugurations
- job fairs
- kickoffs
- open houses

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- retreats
- sales conferences
- stockholders' meetings.

The facilitator should question the client and team representatives to specify the primary purpose of the event and should try to convert the session to

a task-oriented activity so as not to be relegated to the function of recreational director.

How

"On your mark, get set, GO!" the class leader tells a room full of professional trainers after explaining a relay exercise. Suddenly, lively music emerges from the front of the room, and volunteer relay runners race to finish the review exercise first. "Go, go, go!" yells one teammate. "Come on. Come on," another says under his breath.

How do you get your participants this involved?

Training is a challenge for adults, Wilcox observes. "They're uncomfort-

a quick and easy conversion of a typical lecture into an interactive experience. Different types of interactive lectures incorporate built-in quizzes, interspersed tasks, teamwork interludes, and participant control of the presentation.

Interactive Storytelling involves fictional narratives in a variety of forms. Participants may listen to a story and make appropriate decisions at critical junctures. They may also create and share stories that illustrate key concepts, steps, or principles from the instructional content.

Jolts lull participants into behaving in a comfortable way, and they deliver a powerful wake-up call. They force participants to re-examine their assumptions and revise their standard procedures. Jolts typically last for a few minutes but provide enough insight for a lengthy debriefing.

Kinesthetic Learning Devices involve physical activities performed on electrical and mechanical equipment. Participants solve a problem or meet a challenge with the device and relate the process to their workplace activities.

Magic Tricks incorporate a relevant magic trick as a part of a training session. Magic tricks provide metaphors or analogies for some important element of the training content. The tricks are also used as processes to be analyzed, reconstructed, learned, performed, or coached for training participants in

appropriate procedures.

Metaphorical Simulation Games reflect real-world processes in an abstract, simplified fashion. MSGs are particularly useful to teach principles related to planning, generating ideas, testing alternatives, making decisions, utilizing resources, and working under time pressure.

PC Simulations use playing cards to reflect real-world objects and processes. The rules of PC simulations typically encourage participants to discover principles of interpersonal interaction and inductive thinking.

Read.me Games combine the effective organization of well-written materials with the motivational impact of playful activities. Participants read a handout and play a game that uses team support to encourage recall and transfer of what they read.

Role Plays involve participants assuming and acting out characters, personalities, and attitudes other than their own. These activities may be tightly or loosely structured and may involve a participant assuming multiple roles or reversed roles.

Structured Group Discussions use a self-contained instructional format designed to help team members learn together. The activity is facilitated by a mediated system (such as an audiotape, a videotape, or a computer) that presents information, specifies a discussion topic, imposes time limits,

and provides feedback in the form of model responses and checklists.

Structured Sharing represents a special type of framegame that facilitates mutual learning and teaching among the participants. Typical structured sharing activities create a context for a dialogue among participants based on their experience, knowledge, and opinions.

Television Games borrow the structure of popular game shows to present the instructional content and to encourage participants to practice skills. Some of these games use computer game shells. Appropriate strategies ensure that active players and members of the "studio audience" learn from this activity.

Thought Experiments are internal role plays that involve guided visualization. Participants may mentally rehearse new patterns of behavior, ask Eleanor Roosevelt for advice, or hold a dialogue with their alter egos. These activities result in gaining new knowledge and insight.

Video Enhancers are similar to read.me games. Participants watch a videotape that presents the instructional content. Later, they play one or more games that help review and apply the new concepts and skills.

Courtesy of Workshops by Thiagi, 4423 East Trailridge Road, Bloomington, IN 47408; www.thiagi.com. To order a complete copy of Thiagi's Facilitator Toolkit (56 pages), call 812.332.1478. The cost is US\$20.

What About Icebreakers?

“Icebreakers have nothing to do with course content, but they’re essential if you want people to work together,” blares a callout in the article “Four by Four: Games to Train By,” published in the January 1990 issue of *Training & Development Journal*.

Not any longer. These days, experts say, every facet of a training experience must be tied to the learning objective. “You don’t have the luxury of fooling around,” says Carolyn Nilson, author of several books of training games. “The icebreaker also has to be tied in, but it can loosen people up at the same time.”

What is an icebreaker? Is an icebreaker a kind of game or something entirely different? Trainers’ opinions seem to fall on both sides of the fence. In her *Info-line*, “10 Great Games and How to Use Them,” Madelyn Callahan categorizes icebreakers as a type of game, along with exercises and puzzles. In their November 1989 *Info-line*, “Icebreakers: Warm Up Your Audience,” Bob Preziosi and James Leogue categorize games as a type of icebreaker. In *The Trainers’ Dictionary*, Angus Reynolds defines icebreakers as “climate-setting activities that help members of a group get to know one another and get ready for a training session.”

The two main things that differentiate an icebreaker from a game are that icebreakers lack an element of competition and that icebreakers are commonly used at the beginning of a session or training module.

In his March 1998 *Thiagi Game Letter*, Sivasailam Thiagarajan says that icebreakers can

- provide a content outline for the workshop
- help participants find partners for activities
- provide a framework for storing the workshop content mentally
- establish ground rules
- distract participants from their initial anxieties
- energize participants
- pretest participants to make sure they have the prerequisite skills and knowledge.

How do I select an icebreaker? In

his August 1992 *T&D* article “Kinder, Gentler Icebreakers,” Bart Dahmer outlines several questions to make sure your icebreaker is appropriate.

- Could this exercise build barriers instead of creating rapport?
- Could participants fail at what they’re being asked to do?
- Could it embarrass participants, particularly introverted people?
- Should I build more trust before asking people to risk participation?
- Could I achieve the same end with less threatening means?
- Did I choose the exercise because I’d like to do it? Is it appropriate for other learning styles or personality profiles?
- Should I ask a conservative colleague to review the exercise to see how he or she reacts?

If you answer yes to any of those questions, you should consider the potential consequences and seek ways to adapt or replace your icebreaker.

What do I do during the icebreaker? Bob Preziosi and James Leogue recommend these trainer behaviors during an icebreaker:

- Listen, and maintain good eye contact with speakers.
- Refer to trainee comments, addressing participants by name.
- Focus on what trainees need.
- Turn questions back to the group.
- Be enthusiastic.
- Remember that the reasons for the icebreaker are important for trainees to know.
- Make positive statements about individual and group processes.
- Ask questions that can be answered.
- Nod when someone gives an appropriate response.
- Don’t be impatient or indifferent.

By selecting and facilitating your icebreaker with care, you should be able to get participants warmed up to each other, and you, in no time.

able learning new things. Games are a great way to practice and demonstrate in a safe environment.”

“People are more open to games but still fairly nervous,” says Valenti. So, how do you get them to play? Valenti gives the high-school biology class example, asking the following questions: *Do you remember dissecting a frog in biology?* (Most participants answer yes.) *Do you remember any of the lectures about dissecting the frog?* (Most participants answer no.) She then goes on to explain how experience creates vivid memories, counteracting what she terms the “immunology effect” that you should know something just because you’ve been exposed to it.

Sugar finds value in games because “people drop their facades.” He says, “You can get people to do things in role plays that you could never ask them to do otherwise.”

Know your stuff. It’s important that you be familiar with your game intimately before unveiling it to participants. Practice it in advance, and make sure the rules are understandable. Wilcox admits to playing training games with friends and family at cocktail parties. “Knowing the variations that can happen can help you avoid flops,” advises Sugar. The paradox of training games, he continues, is that “the trainer strives to be the loneliest person in the room because no one needs him or her. In a successful game, everyone understands and is involved.”

Explain the link. The vital thing to remember is that the activity must be inextricably linked to the learning objective. If it’s not, participants will balk and think you’re wasting their time and money. The importance of that link has increased since *T&D*’s October 1995 FaxForum, when respondents reported such activities as having participants build a tower out of gumdrops and uncooked spaghetti without talking. Perhaps that exercise could teach about teamwork, but these days the connection between the activity and the learning must be much stronger. The critical variable in game success is job relevance, says Thiagi. It doesn’t matter what the training objective is, as long as you’re not wasting people’s time.

“The game must be linked to the learning objective,” says Takacs. “Otherwise, it’s easy for the audience to reject the activity.” Takacs recommends explaining up-front the link to learning. Valenti agrees, saying, “Tie your activity strongly to your objective, and be explicit about what that objective is.” Remember, she says, a game is just an instructional strategy like any other.

The great thing about games, says Preziosi, is that you can document the learning through the activity by using diagnostic, performance-based games. “You can validate that people have learned,” he says.

Play with fire. Be aware that you’re doing more with participatory activities than satisfying learning objectives. “I’m more confident than ever in using games,” says Wilcox, “because they leave behind memories with sounds, pictures, and feelings.” Preziosi finds the term *hands-on* too restrictive: “Learners are also using their hearts, in grappling with attitudes, beliefs, and perspectives—and using their brains, in learning cognitive skills.” Wilcox concludes: “Games add fire.”

Explain the rules carefully. Participants can become confused or angry if they don’t understand how a game is played. “Don’t expect everyone to understand right from the outset,” says Sugar. “Explain the rules, then post them.” After a few minutes of play, Sugar suggests pausing the action to check everyone’s understanding. If there are lost sheep, go around the room and lead them back into the activity personally.

In her *Info-line*, Callahan offers these steps to foster understanding and participation:

- Clarify expectations at the beginning, and make sure that trainees understand the objectives and game rules. Misunderstanding can lead to resistance and disruptions.
- Make a contract with the group: Agree on expectations, roles, responsibilities, and norms.
- Make a checklist of participants’ expectations; post them, and refer to them during the game.
- Reassure participants that mistakes are part of learning and that they won’t be penalized for failures.
- Never use games that are excessively difficult or threatening.

Use prizes, tools, and toys. “Prizes

“Prizes are really important. They get people psyched up. Having something at stake raises people’s commitment.”

are really important,” says Valenti. “They get people psyched up. Having something at stake raises people’s commitment.” However, she cautions, don’t get prizes that are too nice, like t-shirts. She recommends giving away small items such as candy bars and silly pins.

Toys are another effective tool. “When we train, we’re trying to teach a lot in a small amount of time so we not only have to teach people facts, but we also have to teach them how to use the resources we give them,” says Pike. “The use of tools in instruction is one more step to designing training that gets results. Tools help involve participants in their own learning and allow them to start owning the material. By the end of the training session, each attendee takes home a valuable, easy-to-use resource to reinforce what they’ve learned and remind them of key messages when questions arise.”

CTT consultants use a number of these tools during their training to keep the involvement level high. Consultants use colorful stickers shaped like dots for keeping track of points that participants can accumulate and use toward prizes at the end of the session. Koosh Balls are kept on the tables for fidgeters, a less distracting alternative to pen-clicking or toe-tapping. Pike also recommends using exaggerated props (huge plastic telephones, hats, capes, etc.) in role-play situations. That reduces tension, adds to the fun, and aids retention.

How else can you get participants involved? Sugar suggests taping pieces of flipchart paper to the walls and writing out people’s reactions and suggestions. “People respond to reflections of their own thoughts,” he says.

Know how to handle flops and difficult participants. Takacs advises, “If an uncomfortable situation arises, don’t

ignore it. You must face what’s happening in the room. If you ignore it, you send the message that you’re not going to be open with the participants.”

Here’s how to handle different levels of participant resistance.

- Low-level sniping. Talk to the person alone during a break.
- An inappropriate outburst. Reflect the participant’s feelings back, and then ask him or her how the group should proceed.
- Anger or incomprehension. Ask the person, “Why are you upset? What would you like from me?”

Furthermore, writes Callahan, reward and reinforce cooperation and serious contributions. Show dissidents that you welcome their positive contributions.

If someone doesn’t want to participate, Sugar suggests, ask him or her to serve as an official observer or a judge. Don’t embarrass the person; do your best to make him or her feel comfortable.

Keep your sense of humor. “Don’t take participants’ comments personally,” says Takacs, “but do fully accept the blame for a game’s failure.” A world-class sense of humor can really help in these situations. If a game doesn’t go over well, Takacs laughs and tells the group, “You should have gone with the higher bidder!”

Make the session fun and active. Bob Pike offers these tips for taking care of your participants and yourself.

- Get the wheels spinning with pre-session brainteasers. Participants shift from a linear to a creative mode when trying to decipher them, becoming more open to comprehension and retention as a result.
- Improve class flow by eliminating interruptions. Ask office or hotel personnel to post nonemergency messages outside of your classroom door during sessions.
- Get the blood flowing. Before brief class projects and exercises, have students stand when they’re done to provide them with energy-boosting stretch breaks as well as subtle pressure to finish.
- Involve the sense of hearing. The more senses involved, the more information people will retain. Play music before class. As airlines know, this also reduces tension.
- Refreshments anyone? Invite participants to help themselves to refresh-

ments, made available in the room, during breaks and controlled stretch breaks. This helps reduce tension and increases learning retention by involving another of the senses.

❑ Take care of yourself. Pack pick-me-ups in your trainer bag, such as herb teas, aspirin, breath freshener, and antacid tablets. For an emotional boost, keep handy affirmations and positive messages from past participants.

Don't be afraid to say "I don't know." Jack Wolf, president of Lifelong Learning Partners, quotes Einstein: "Learning does not occur when you say 'I know'; learning occurs only when you say 'I don't know.'" Admitting what you don't know creates an environment where new and innovative solutions can be discovered jointly, says Wolf. When you say, "I already know," you prevent the possibility of learning anything new.

Wolf offers these ways to share this concept with your participants.

❑ Discuss how learners can incorporate

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an open-minded attitude that results from admitting that they don't know everything.

❑ Let managers know that this attitude lets staff present their own points of view and sharpen their thinking and problem-solving skills.

❑ Encourage learners to collaborate to find new solutions.

❑ Say "I don't know" sometimes, and let the group find the answer. This way, you maximize the intelligence in the room and lift some of the burden of hav-

ing to be the expert from your shoulders. Provide closure with closers. "Closers are the mirror images of icebreakers or openers," Thiagi writes in his April 1998 newsletter. "They are activities that help you wind down your workshop. An effective closer brings a training session to a memorable close."

Closers can serve many useful purposes. You can use them to

❑ tie up loose ends and clarify unclear concepts

❑ review, share, and consolidate notes

❑ prepare and share job aids

❑ get feedback on improving the session

❑ congratulate participants for the successful completion of the workshop

❑ shift the focus from the workshop to the workplace.

Make sure learning goes back to the job. Because of the rapidly changing nature of the business environment, it's more important than ever to use creative

techniques to make learning stick. “Learning is never going to stop. People used to work in a job for 20 years using the same skills. Now, there’s a new word-processing program every year,” says Pike.

The challenge for trainers is in making the learning last beyond the classroom. According to Pike, CTT has always viewed training as a process, not an event. “The process is not complete until we see results on the job,” he says.

One way to achieve the best results on the job, aside from teaching participants to refer to their seminar resources, is to convince employers to reinforce training back in the office. “Lack of training reinforcement is the biggest barrier to training success,” says Pike. After a seminar, he says, “participants need encouragement and support from their employers, as well as the opportunity to apply what they’ve learned while the skills and knowledge are still fresh in their minds.

“We make sure that participants have take-away value from our seminars, and we work with them to make sure that when they leave, they have an action plan with incentives for following through.”

One way CTT has found to reinforce learning on a daily basis is with a Post-it Custom Printed Notes calendar. Using a new technology called Extreme2, 3M’s promotional markets business unit can now print a different message on each page of a Post-it Note Pad. CTT has used this technology to create a desk calendar with a creative training tip for each day of the year.

Why

Ah, the \$64,000 question. The whole value of a training game is in its results. Although you’ve explained the link to learning at the start of the game, the end is when you really get to the heart of the matter, through the debrief, the vital part of the process. It’s the step in which the transfer of learning is actually demonstrated. Thiagi has developed a six-phase process for the debrief.

Phase 1: How do you feel? Begin this phase with a broad question that invites participants to get in touch with their feelings about the activity and its outcomes.

Phase 2: What happened? Begin this phase with a broad question that asks

“Closers are the mirror images of icebreakers. An effective closer brings a training session to a memorable close.”

participants to recall important events from the activity. Create and post a chronological list. Ask questions about specific events.

Phase 3: What did you learn? Present a principle, and ask participants for data that supports or rejects it. Then, invite them to offer their principles based on their experience.

Phase 4: How does this relate to the real world? Ask a broad question about the relationship between the experiential activity and events in the workplace. Ask participants to offer real-world analogies.

Phase 5: What if? Present a change scenario, and ask trainees to speculate on how it would have affected the process and outcomes of the activity. Then, invite participants to offer their own scenarios and discuss them.

Phase 6: What next? Ask participants to suggest strategies for use in future rounds of the activity. Then, ask them how they would change their real-world behaviors as a result of the insight gained from the activity.

A training game that is carefully selected, effectively facilitated, and skillfully debriefed can create a learning experience that participants will long remember. Nilson thinks that games can

- add to the value of the human resources in your company
- result in knowledge creation in flesh and bone, not just in a computer database
- focus learners on the process of organizational life, not content or individual skill (the “Lone Ranger” syndrome)
- give people distance from a problem while making it more accessible
- help people find new ways to communicate through language constructs such as storytelling and metaphors.

People at all levels have more respon-

sibility, Nilson continues, and empowered employees and flatter hierarchies require new kinds of communication. “Games can soften the edges,” she explains. “People are clearly searching for answers.” Through the effective use of training games, you can provide the answers and help learners discover new ways of communication that will serve them in the rapidly changing business world. □

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