

Trainer Essentials: The Four Things that Learners Need

When you deliver a workshop on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) you want participants to remember and apply what you have taught. You can increase the chances that this will occur by providing participants with four things:

- 1) A safe learning environment
- 2) Connection to existing knowledge
- 3) Motivation
- 4) Practice

When these needs are met participants are engaged and are more likely to remember and apply what they learn. Below is a brief summary of each of these needs and some suggestions on how to address them.

A Safe Learning Environment

A safe learning environment is one where participants feel a sense of belonging and acceptance, where they are comfortable sharing their views and perspectives, and feel respected. Creating a safe learning environment is the groundwork for all learning. To ensure that learning can take place, we need to identify potential sources of stress and create an environment where participants feel physically, emotionally and psychologically secure.

Below are some suggestions of what you can do to reduce stress and create a safe learning environment:

Address the physical needs of participants

- Provide snacks and lunch – when participants are hungry they cannot focus on learning
- Provide clean and safe toilets and invite people to use them whenever necessary
- Ensure the participants are all able to hear and see information easily

Address the emotional and psychological needs of participants:

- Establish a group agreement at the beginning of the workshop that emphasizes respect for all participants
- Communicate in a respectful, open and friendly manner
- Organize and deliver information that addresses different learning styles and different speeds of learning
- Encourage participants to share their knowledge and experience
- Address disrespectful or discriminatory behaviour

For more detailed information on creating a safe learning environment, see the *Trainer Essential: Creating a Safe Learning Environment*.

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Connection to existing knowledge

The more points of connection we can find between new information and participants existing knowledge and experience, the more likely they are to retain and apply it. We create these connections by making information meaningful and relating it to what participants already know. The stronger the relevance and the connection to existing knowledge the better participants will retain the information.

We often apply this principal when we give directions. We try to think of reference points that the person already knows. The more reference points we provide the easier it is for the person to understand and remember the directions. We can use a similar approach when we teach about a new concept in WASH. For instance, if you are teaching about water borne diseases, find out what water borne illnesses participants have experienced and what they did about them. You can then connect the content of the lesson directly to their personal experiences.

Motivation

Motivation is important to learning because motivated people learn better and faster (Stanford Centre for Teaching and Learning, 1998). Motivated participants are also more likely to take action on what they have learned and incorporate it into their everyday lives. This is particularly crucial when teaching about water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).

In education, motivation is defined as anything that encourages the student to participate and learn (Bennett & Rolheiser, 2001). There are two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation comes from within the learner. It is driven by interest in the topic, personal development or enjoyment, and does not rely on external pressures. When we make information interesting and relevant to the participants we can stimulate their intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation comes from outside the individual. Grades, rewards and threats of punishment are common forms of extrinsic motivation.

Ideally, you want all participants to be intrinsically motivated; however, this is not always possible. Somebody may not be interested in a certain topic until they have been exposed to it or understand its relevance to their life. Forms of extrinsic motivation, like competition, can be used to pique someone's interest in a topic and kindle their intrinsic motivation.

To learn more on how you can motivate participants see *Trainer Essentials: Motivation*.

Practice

You know the saying: "Practice makes perfect". The more we try something the better we get, and the more we remember. During workshops we need to provide participants with meaningful opportunities to practice what we are teaching them. Meaningful practice connects new

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knowledge and skills to what learners already know. It also helps participants remember what they have learned.

There are a number of activities that can be used, regardless of the topic, to add meaningful practice time to lessons including:

- Think, pair, share
- Group discussion
- Participant presentations or demonstrations
- Solving a case study problem
- Doing hands-on activities and simulations
- Role play

For more ideas on activities that can be used to encourage meaningful practice see: *Trainer Essentials: Active Learning*.

When you create a safe learning environment, connect participants to their past experience, build on their motivation and provide them with opportunities to practice you are helping them to learn and retain what you are teaching. Each of the needs takes time to fill, but it is time well spent, since it will ensure your message is understood and remembered.

References

Bennett, B., & Rolheiser, C. (2001). *Beyond Monet*. Toronto, Ontario: Bookations Inc.

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