

Trainer Essentials: Qualities of an Effective Trainer

What are the essential qualities of someone who teaches about water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)? Of course, they need to understand the fundamentals of WASH. But what other knowledge, skills and attitudes does someone need to transfer new concepts to participants and ensure they apply them? Below we look at the differences between a trainer, teacher and facilitator and identify some of the important qualities of WASH trainers.

Training, Teaching and Facilitating

People often use the words teacher, trainer and facilitator interchangeably to describe an individual working in education. These titles are however very different. A teacher may have a very different skill set than a facilitator or trainer, and vice versa. Below we look at the differences between teachers, facilitators and trainers.

- **Teacher:** Teachers are usually academically trained (meaning they have studied different methods and theories of teaching at college or university). They are licensed to teach in formal settings such as schools. Teaching generally has a set plan to help students learn broad knowledge, usually over a long time frame (Sinha, 2008). Teaching is often driven by a curriculum, learning outcomes and standards set by the government.
- **Facilitator:** A facilitator may, or may not, have knowledge of the content the group is working with. They have an overall goal and vision of possibilities. They have an undetermined time frame and no predetermined plan. A facilitator helps people talk and listen to each other so that they can mutually arrive at a shared outcome or destination (English, 2005).
- **Trainer:** Trainers help people develop knowledge, skills and attitudes related to a specific topic. A trainer is knowledgeable about the content and may use facilitation skills and teaching methods to promote effective learning. Training generally has specific objectives to be achieved within a set and usually short time frame (Pollice, 2003). It is often driven by organizational needs for people to do their jobs properly. Training is usually delivered in the form of an individual session, workshop or course.

Based on the above definitions, WASH trainers have knowledge about water, sanitation and hygiene and use facilitation skills and teaching methods to deliver workshops. Being an effective trainer requires many professional and personal traits in addition to being an expert in a specific topic. Simply having the knowledge does not mean that one can transfer it to others effectively. The next section will focus on the knowledge, skills and attitudes of an effective trainer.

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Qualities of an Effective Trainer

The following list identifies the knowledge, skills and attitudes of effective WASH trainers. You may also think of other qualities in addition to this list. When looking at the list reflect on which qualities you already have, which ones you are missing, and which ones you need to improve.



Knowledge

Trainers need knowledge about:

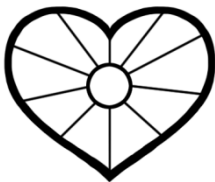
- How people learn
- What learners need – connection to past experiences, motivation, safe learning environment and practice
- Group dynamics
- What resources are available for training and how to use them
- Local culture and participants' background
- Water, sanitation and hygiene



Skills

Trainers need skills in:

- Communication
- Active listening
- Effective questioning
- Thinking and adapting quickly
- Time management
- Adapting lessons to fit participants' needs
- Giving clear instructions
- Workshop preparation and lesson planning



Attitudes

Trainers need the following attitudes:

- Self-reflective
- Open to feedback and willing to learn
- Humble
- Respectful
- Friendly
- Patient
- Flexible
- Professional
- Honest and confident in being able to say "I don't know"
- Positive and engaged

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Developing the Qualities of an Effective Trainer

As you develop your knowledge, skills and attitudes in training keep the following in mind:

Be self-reflective: The first step in becoming a better trainer is self-reflection and being comfortable with receiving feedback. Effective trainers continually reflect on how well a lesson was planned and delivered. Reflecting on how you handled unplanned situations and what might have worked better improves your ability to solve future problems and your overall training delivery (Hellison, 2003).

After each workshop evaluate what you did well, how you can improve, and what you will do differently next time. And remember, your goal is to ensure that participants remember what you teach and integrate it into their everyday practice.

Be authentic: Each trainer is unique. What works for one trainer may not work for another. You must find the balance between leaving your comfort zone to try new things and being relaxed and confident. When you are in front of a group be authentic. Participants will know if you are pretending to be someone that you aren't. They will also be appreciative when they get to know the real you and see all that you have to offer.

Stay current: As WASH trainers we have the responsibility to be accurate and use up-to-date information. We need to ensure that we are transferring facts and not myths, and that our sources of information are legitimate. When we bring accurate information to participants we can go a long way in bringing positive change to their communities.

In addition to being knowledgeable in WASH, we also need to stay current on training techniques. There are constant advances in the area of education and new and better ideas on how to transfer knowledge effectively. Take courses, look to your peers and review literature to stay on top of new developments.

Becoming an effective WASH trainer does not happen overnight. It is a continuous process of self-reflection, self-improvement, and the integration of new knowledge, skills and attitudes. It requires trainers to be authentic in their practice and to stay current in WASH and training. When we work hard to be the best we can be as WASH trainers, we ensure that our participants receive high quality training and can improve WASH in their homes and communities.

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