

# Trainer Essentials: Responding to Training Challenges

## Training Challenges

As trainers in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) we work with diverse groups of participants. Dynamics between participants and logistical problems can add unanticipated challenges to our work. We need to be prepared to handle these challenges effectively as they arise.

Below is a list of common training challenges and effective ways to respond. Review the challenges and consider what approaches you could use to resolve them. There are multiple potential responses. The responses fall in no particular order or priority; choose the one that is best for you and your specific situation. Remember, the responses are just suggestions, and include only some ways of responding. As you gain more experience in training you will discover many more.

Challenge	Recommended Responses
<p><b>A participant gives the wrong answer</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For every response ensure that the participant feels appreciated for their contribution.</li> <li>• Tell the participant kindly and clearly that their answer is incorrect.</li> <li>• Thank the participant for their answer. Show with body language that you are giving their answer serious thought despite it being wrong. Explain that it is not the answer that you are looking for. Ask other participants if they have a different answer.</li> <li>• Ask the participant how they arrived at their answer. Identify any flaws in their logic, and explain how they could think through the question differently to arrive at a more appropriate answer.</li> <li>• Highlight any part of the participant's answer that is correct. Explain that one part of their answer is correct and you are looking for something more. Ask other participants if they can add to the response to make it more accurate.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Participant gives an insufficient answer</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledge the parts of the participant's response that were correct.</li> <li>• Ask other participants to add more information.</li> <li>• Ask participants to talk with a partner to develop a more accurate response.</li> <li>• Use probing questions to help the participant elaborate further on their ideas.</li> <li>• Re-phrase your question or be more specific to ensure that participants understand your question correctly.</li> </ul>

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<p><b>Participant misunderstands the meaning of a question or information provided</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stay positive and ensure that the participant does not feel at blame for their misunderstanding. Take ownership for their lack of clarity.</li> <li>• Paraphrase what the participant has said to clarify your understanding, and identify what may be confusing them.</li> <li>• Re-phrase the information or question.</li> <li>• Use different examples to illustrate your point, focusing on ideas that are already clear to participants.</li> <li>• Ask a participant that understood the question or information to rephrase it in their words.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Participant gives a long-winded response</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interrupt politely; maintain eye contact with the participant to show that you have listened to their point.</li> <li>• Review and summarize only relevant information given by the participant.</li> <li>• At the beginning of a discussion give a time or word limit to responses.</li> <li>• Give participants a few moments to write down what they want to say before sharing it with the group.</li> <li>• Stand near the person and touch them lightly on the shoulder. This may make them conscious of the fact that they are rambling. Acknowledge the contribution and explain that you need to move on to a new topic.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Participant is performing a skill or task incorrectly</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mitigate the opportunity for participants to do things incorrectly by demonstrating the skill and providing good instructions at the beginning.</li> <li>• Recognize that mistakes can be learning opportunities and share this philosophy with participants.</li> <li>• Always consider the participants feelings. If it is embarrassing for them to be corrected in front of their peers, do it privately.</li> <li>• Provide a general correction to the full group rather than pinpointing one person specifically.</li> <li>• Explain the corrections to the participant and then demonstrate the skill again.</li> <li>• Ask the participant why they are performing the skill “incorrectly”. Perhaps there is a legitimate reason for their approach.</li> <li>• Provide an explanation for why the skill needs to be performed in a specific way.</li> <li>• Take ownership in front of the group if needed, and blame yourself for not communicating clearly or providing bad instructions.</li> </ul>

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<p><b>Participant is doing something dangerous</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mitigate dangerous scenarios by demonstrating skills correctly, anticipating what participants may do wrong, and teaching them about what they should avoid doing.</li> <li>• Assess the scene for dangers. Identify all elements of the scene that could be dangerous.</li> <li>• Remove all participants from an area where they could be hurt or in danger.</li> <li>• Tell the participant that is doing something dangerous to stop what they were doing.</li> <li>• Remove the participant in question from the dangerous situation immediately.</li> <li>• Be calm and deliberate.</li> <li>• If necessary, shout to attract attention.</li> <li>• Debrief what occurred with participants in a safe place. Ensure that everyone is aware of potential dangers and how to mitigate them.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Participants aren't listening – you can't get their attention</b></p>	<p>Consider <b>why</b> participants are not paying attention. Possibilities include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. You have not given the participants enough time to finish their discussion:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Go to groups individually and listen to what they are talking about. If they are on topic ask them how much more time they need. After the indicated amount of time, tell participants they have 1 minute to finish their conversation.</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Participants are confused and are seeking clarity from the people around them:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ If you have already provided verbal instructions for an activity, write the instructions on the board and then try again to get participants attention and focus them on what is written on the board.</li> <li>○ If participants are confused after you explain a new concept, give them some time to talk about it and then try again to get their attention. Ask one of the participants to explain the concept in their own words.</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. They are not interested in what you are talking about:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ask participants why they are not interested in what you are talking about. This can be done with the full group or with a small group of participants. Perhaps the participants know the information already or do not think that it is relevant. Based on how participants respond, change what you are doing.</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. You are not getting their attention in the right way             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Establish and practice a signal at the beginning of the</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

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	<p>workshop that you will use throughout to get participants' attention.</p> <p>5. Side Conversations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Figure out why participants are having side conversations: Are they confused? Do they want to share an example? Are they bored?</li> <li>○ Do an impromptu group or pair conversation or ask participants to do an individual activity to reinforce something in the lesson and keep the participants engaged.</li> </ul>
<p><b>A participant goes off topic in the discussion</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Thank the participant for their contribution. Explain that time is limited and you need to move the discussion back on topic.</li> <li>● If what the participant is talking about will come up in a future lesson tell them they will have time to discuss it later.</li> <li>● If the topic of the conversation is relevant, but you did not plan to discuss it, add it to the “parking lot” or list of topics to be reviewed at a later time.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Participants keep asking questions that are beyond the scope of the lesson</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In the introduction of the workshop explain the flow of the agenda and the main topics that participants will be focusing on each day.</li> <li>● At the beginning of the lesson share the learning outcomes or the lesson descriptions so participants understand what will be covered.</li> <li>● Turn participants questions into a teaser for the next day, “For instance, that’s a really good question, we are going to be talking about that in the next lesson . . .”</li> <li>● Write the participants question on a piece of flip chart paper. You can title the piece of paper “Parking Lot” or anything else that signifies putting something on hold. Tell participants you will return to the discussion at the end of the workshop.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Participants are challenging you</b></p>	<p>Remember that a participant challenging the trainer can be a positive experience as it allows participants to test their ideas and contribute new information related to what they are learning. However, when challenging comments begin to take you off topic, or simply go deeper into the topic than required for other participants, then it can become a problem. Here are a few solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Explain to participants that their questions are beyond the depth or scope of the lesson and that there isn’t enough time to address their questions in the lesson. You can offer to discuss the questions with the participant and others that are interested during the next break.</li> <li>● If the participant is challenging you with correct information that is beyond your level of knowledge and you know they are an expert,</li> </ul>

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	<p>give them an extra responsibility. Offer the participant a designated time to share some of their expertise with the group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the challenges become disruptive to the full group, in private, explain to the participant that their challenges are disrupting the group dynamic. Ask them how you can address their questions productively without impacting the group dynamic. If appropriate, have this conversation with the full group, particularly if many participants are challenging you.</li> </ul>
<p><b>One of the participants is dominating the workshop by answering all the questions that are being asked.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When you ask a question try not to make eye contact with the participant in question, so they will have less opportunity to answer.</li> <li>• Allow more time for other participants to process the questions and choose others to answer.</li> <li>• Ask participants to think about their answers for at least 10 seconds before they raise their hands. This will allow more participants to think before you choose someone to answer.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Participants are in a heated debate with each other</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find out why participants are debating; is it on topic or off topic? If the debate is off topic, bring participants focus back to the lesson with a phrase like: “Ok, we’re getting started again...” or “you are welcome to continue your discussion at another time. We are going to get back to the lesson now”.</li> <li>• If the debate is on topic, use it as a learning opportunity and invite participants to elaborate on their position and facilitate a full group discussion on the topic.</li> </ul>
<p><b>One of the participants is being treated disrespectfully by some of the other people in the workshop</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be sure that the participants picking on the person are separated from him/her during group activities.</li> <li>• Pull aside the participants who are disrespecting the other person. Ask participants to explain why they are treating the other person as they are, and how they interpret their own behavior (they may not consider it a lack of respect). Clarify any confusion and explain your expectations in terms of their behavior. Refer to the group agreement and the rule around respect. Ask them to respect the rule.</li> <li>• If the negative behaviour continues, you may need to ask the people who are treating the participant disrespectfully to leave the workshop.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Participants keep showing up late</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask participants why they are late. Some may be coming late because of the long distance they need to walk to attend the workshop or because of traffic, etc.</li> <li>• Consult with participants at the beginning of the workshop, and</li> </ul>

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	<p>agree upon the time that the workshop will begin and end so that everyone can arrive on time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Come to an agreement at the beginning of the workshop regarding the consequences of being late. i.e. will participants need to dance, bring snacks for everyone, etc.?</li> </ul>
<b>A participant misses a day or part of a day of the workshop</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish an agreement at the beginning of the workshop regarding the consequences of missing a day.</li> <li>• Consider granting a different level of certificate, i.e. a certificate of completion for those that attend everything and a certificate of participation for those who miss a day.</li> <li>• Find out why participants are absent. Decide on a mutually agreeable way to get the participants caught up on the content.</li> </ul>
<b>A participant is constantly taking calls during the workshop</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Privately explain to the participant that their behaviour is disturbing the class. Ask them how they would like to deal with the situation. Offer some alternatives, i.e. take the calls during lunch or breaks.</li> </ul>
<b>Some people understand the language of training very well and others do not</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find out who has difficulty with the language. One way to do this is a blind poll. Ask everyone to close their eyes, and then ask people to raise their hands if they have difficulty with reading, writing or speaking the language used in training. This technique maintains the privacy of individuals, and may make it easier for them to be honest about their language level.</li> <li>• Mix students with high and low language skills in small groups and within the full group.</li> <li>• Write down instructions and key points.</li> <li>• Get an interpreter.</li> <li>• Allow participants to speak in small groups in their own language.</li> <li>• Ask one of the participants that is more comfortable in the language to translate instructions.</li> <li>• Each time you use a new term or piece of vocabulary add it to a piece of flip chart. Keep a running list of new vocabulary that participants can refer to.</li> </ul>
<b>Participants have brought their children to the training</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If there are multiple facilitators, assign one to take care of the children.</li> <li>• Ask participants if they know someone you can pay to come and take care of the children.</li> <li>• Bring a box of toys for children. Provide extra breaks between lessons so participants can tend to their children.</li> <li>• Plan with anticipation, organize childcare for participants and ensure there is enough food and snacks for them.</li> </ul>

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<p><b>Something external to the workshop has happened to a person. It makes it difficult for them to mentally focus and be present at the workshop.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a private discussion with that participant and ask them what they need. Respect their space and don't demand too much of them during a workshop. Don't ask them a question without warning them.</li> </ul>
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