



Creativity and Intuition in the Design of Training

by Jay Orlin

“Performance” is the truly operative word in the current and past name of our organization. When the National Society for Performance and Instruction changed to International Society for Performance Improvement, the emphasis on “Performance” was the real survivor.

There are always several measures of performance for designers of training. They usually include elements such as a financial component, conformity to a schedule, accuracy of content, transferability to the workplace, value to the audience and student satisfaction. I want to spend this time addressing the last three of those.

Training effectiveness, in my mind, is directly related to the degree of sustained audience attention and focus generated by the training experience. The factors which most naturally contribute to sustained attention and focus are presentation and the importance of the content to students. Without sustained audience attention, minimal value is gained from the training effort.

Training designers have a tremendous role to play in shaping their programs to maximize audience attention. The presenters, assuming a lecture-based situation, constitute the other major factor. Equipment, classroom and the rest help to improve the experience, but are fundamentally less essential than the first two.

I have seen a great deal of instructional design which was technically accurate, constructed following step-by-step Instructional Design System (ISD) principles, proven in pilot tests, contained viable performance measures, but was basically flat and boring. How can that be, you ask? I have some theories to share about that and some suggestions on how to improve the situation.

ISD is arguably the dominant paradigm underlying the instructional design process. It was designed by the military to provide a highly procedural model which netted all of the important details required to train a subject. It is a solid, substantial and functional model. Its emphasis is on an “institutional quality” functionality because when it was designed they weren’t overly concerned about entertaining the student.

In our world, we are concerned about entertaining the student. The phrase “edutainment” is currently popular for a reason. We really need to take the design process further and pay a lot more attention to making classes interesting and engaging. Does that mean that ISD is no longer useful? You will never hear that from me. Those “institutional” skills are the bedrock of discipline that provides our profession with the integrity it has. Just like music, in which rules and principles are mathematically determined, there is room for endless variety. We need to move from scales and simply hitting the correct notes to making great music.

We do that by infusing our work with innovation, creativity, excitement and emotion. Is that getting too far out there? I don’t think so. In the spirit of this conversation, I will not provide a set of steps but rather a series of ideas.

Audience analysis is an opportunity to do more than view the potential student population like something in a Petri dish under a microscope. It is a chance to walk a few miles in their moccasins and get a feeling for their uniqueness. Ask to drive the bulldozer, or make some entries on the spreadsheet, or look over their shoulder as they troubleshoot a problem. What the heck, have a beer with them.

Look inside yourself and notice what about the work and the training moves you. This introspective activity can lead to amazing insights. Many remarkable discoveries, such as the structure of DNA, are not the result of deduc-

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tive reasoning but the product of the mysterious synthesis that occurs in the human brain. Learning to value and trust your intuition is sometimes a challenge. Intuitive feelings can provide some important pointers which, when followed up with research, can add exceptional value to your work.

The topic of intuition in business is becoming more accepted all the time and if you listen to what really successful people say in interviews and conversations you will frequently hear phrases such as "I just went with my gut feeling" or "It somehow just seemed right." I guarantee that if you keep listening for it you will hear it from CEOs, artists, managers, and the President of the United States.

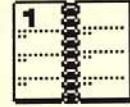
Another way to activate this energy in yourself is to intentionally emphasize creativity in your life. I like to use index cards with questions or phrases that currently catch my imagination. It's a kind of affirmation or visioning cue. "Turn it upside down and inside out and then when it's back together what do you see?"

Common sense—that undefinable quality about people, places and things is another valuable asset. If you are working on something, and it fits the step-by-step model, but "doesn't make sense," pay attention to that. If something feels counter-intuitive, look closely at what is going on. You will probably find the problem if you stay with it.

Is it really possible for an instructional designer to communicate his or her enthusiasm and emotion into course material that is going to be taught by someone else? There is only one answer and I invite you to use your common sense to arrive at it. Instructional design is in large measure a literary activity. Almost every training output is based on some written material, whether it is a study guide, instructor guide, workbook, job aid, or media script.

A play by Shakespeare and an instructional course have a lot in common. They have a message, a flow, a set of conditions required to transmit the message, and other people present them. And if they are not particularly interesting, people don't like to go to them. I know I am stretching a metaphor by invoking Shakespeare, but the point is that the written word can and does embody energy. To be "Live and Motivating or Functionally Khaki," that is the question.

Mark Your Calendars



Upcoming Events

Date Event

- Nov. 8th* **Board Meeting**
6:00 pm
Tandem Computers
10400 Ridgeview Court
Loc. 208, Room 2020
Cupertino
(Ridgeview Court is off
Pruneridge Ave.)
All Members Welcome!
- Nov. 16th* **General Meeting**
6:30 pm
Moira Gagen
Measurable Skills Development through Mentoring
- Dec. 2nd* **Holiday Party**
Where: J. Lohr Winery
When: 7-10 p.m.
See flyer for details. For more information, call Lorraine Schmidt at (408) 927-9662.

My intent here has been to provoke thinking and to encourage exploration into how courseware can become more engaging. Each of us is a source of enormous creativity and innovation and it is simply a matter of valuing and attending to the insights that are naturally available to us. Keep listening and trusting your intuition and look to your own energy and passion for direction and you will find exactly the knowledge and inspiration you need.

Jay Orlin is local training consultant, the author of many articles and a book titled "Training To Win: Strategies for Today's Industrial Challenges." He is also a dedicated member of the Silicon Valley Chapter of ISPI.