



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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Bon Voyage!

When organizations go international, trainers have to follow suit.

Global diversity is a training challenge. An international trainer has to simultaneously cater to geographical style differences and varied learning styles of trainees. Often, even unpredictable elements like the setting and weather play active roles in determining the success of a training workshop.

When training a cross-cultural audience, a trainer might unintentionally be offensive and alienate certain trainees. Well-prepared, energetic and focused trainers can overcome such challenges. International trainers should also avoid the minefield of certain potential mistakes.

Spicy variety

Audiences vary not only from place to place but also from workshop to workshop. While web-based training and e-learning can easily help overcome geographical distances, at some point the trainees leave their workstations to engage in interactive sessions. This is where a trainer steps in.

Trainers who are widely traveled and well-experienced can connect well with an international audience. They know that what works in San Francisco won't work in Seoul! With their valuable and varied experiences they encourage complete audience participation.

Local lingo

When the cold war ended, Billy Crystal began his show in Moscow by speaking in Russian for the first five minutes. Billy Crystal doesn't speak Russian - he had memorized his act to break the ice with the audience! Needless to say, the audience howled their approval. Using local language, customs and examples makes training content more pertinent and interesting.

Trainers should avoid phrases that don't translate well. For example phrases like "clear as a bell" and "right as rain" might help drive a point in some English speaking countries. However, they cause confusion and hostility in others. Presentations need to thus accommodate regional differences.

Relevant content

Content should not only be relevant to what is being taught - it should also be relevant for the people being taught! The training curriculum must be based on the workings of the organization. The trainer should avoid being too theoretical and academic. What works well with an international audience is a presentation replete with real examples and discussions of issues that the organization faces.

Some 'local tricks' trainers follow to retain training content relevancy include:



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One international trainer says, "I read the local newspaper and alternative weekly newspapers to get a sense of the hot issues in the city and then try to bring them up in the context of my workshop."

"I get to know and appreciate their country, and I bring it up. I might say something like, 'I'm really enjoying your summer storms here! I know that you get pretty tired of them, but it really is refreshing to a Britisher like me'", says another international trainer.

Always ask, never assume

This holds true especially for an international audience. Generally, trainers assume that all participants come from a similar background. However, international trainers should acknowledge the diversity in trainees. To warm up to an international audience, the trainer should start by asking simple questions about business experiences and educational backgrounds.

He should then move to discussing current business issues. Participants should be encouraged to share their opinions and ideas on industrial trends, competitors and managerial policies. Once the conversation warms up, trainers can get to the training topics. Having built a rapport, the trainer can ask the trainees to share a bit of personal information about their hobbies and families. This way, a trainer can highlight the rich range of experiences a global group of trainees represent. A few other time-tested techniques to enhance 'international' training appeal are:

Speak clearly

A trainer recently addressed a large international audience from eleven countries in seven different languages. For the non-English speakers simultaneous translators were available. The trainer had packed his presentation with anecdotes, humorous stories and key learning points. What pleased him the most during the presentation was hearing the Japanese contingent laugh at his jokes.

But after the presentation a member of the Japanese contingent came up to the trainer and said, "Sir, you spoke so quickly that the interpreter was unable to follow. So, instead of translating the presentation he spent most of the time talking in Japanese about how funny it is to see an American fellow rushing about in a big hurry on stage!" With an international audience always speak slowly and clearly.

Lessen the gap

In an international group, trainees participate in different languages. Some trainees may find it difficult to understand a speaker's vocabulary and pronunciation. A trainer can bridge this communication gap by translating or repeating their comments. The use of non-verbal presentation tools (pictures, icons, video clips) further reduces the gap.

Diverse groups have certain advantages. While the newcomers bring in fresh ideas, the old timers can share their wisdom. The locals can gauge the surroundings better and expatriates add an international perspective. It is up to the trainer to identify, blend and utilize the experiences of all the trainees.

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No jokes

A cautious trainer refrains from comments on ethnic, religious and political issues. In a diverse group, even humor might backfire. What is funny to one group might be offensive to another. Often even light-hearted remarks can be misconstrued.

Double check

Most trainers distribute handouts and workbooks. When translating these into other languages, the trainer should check the phrases and choice of words. A professional translator should be hired. The final print should be tested. A few trainees could go through it first.

A Service Quality Centre in Singapore used the phrase “Never settle” which meant, “Strive for continuous improvement”. When their manual was translated into Mandarin the phrase read, “Never agree in a negotiation” and in Indonesia it became, “Don’t sit down!”

Improve participation

Sharing experiences: This is one of the biggest advantages of international training. But trainees need to be motivated to share their opinions and ideas. A trainer can boost participation by mixing and combining the groups in various ways. They can, for instance, be split into small or large groups depending on their date of birth, color of hair, first letter of their names, their favorite animal, etc. to spice up the session.

Outspoken: Americans are naturally more outspoken than the Japanese! A trainer should encourage all the participants to speak. Structuring participation can do this.

Back together: Dividing participants into groups increases participation, but at the end of the training session, the trainer should remember to re-assemble all the participants for a debriefing session. Summarizing the key learning points and highlighting the contribution of each group establishes the relevance of training.

An efficient trainer learns fast from the participants’ reactions. He modifies and adapts suitably as he delivers. By reading the audience and being sincere, an international trainer can meet international challenges!