



Training from the **BACK** of the Room!



**65 WAYS TO
STEP ASIDE AND
LET THEM LEARN**



SHARON L. BOWMAN

Foreword by JAY CROSS

Training from the **BACK** of the Room!

65

Ways to Step Aside and Let Them Learn

About This Book

Why is this topic important?

We talk too much. As trainers and teachers, we bore our learners to death. We don't mean to. We truly think that we are doing the opposite. But the fact remains: As long as learners are passively sitting and listening to us talk, they are not learning much. It gets worse. Those of us who train trainers, or who teach people how to teach, are often modeling the exact strategies we rail against. We lecture about not lecturing. We read straight from our PowerPoint® slides. We ignore current brain research and use outdated instructional strategies that never worked well to begin with. To compound the problem, as more people realize that they can get a wealth of knowledge from the Internet—*what* they need *when* they need it—there is absolutely *no* reason for them to sit in a classroom and waste their time while someone drones on and on. They know this. The resistance to this type of learning grows stronger with each generation.

So as trainers and teachers, the single most challenging thing for us to do is to step aside and allow learners to learn. Real learning takes place when we stop talking and our learners start talking. Real learning takes place when learners participate in the instructional process, from beginning to end. And real learning takes place when learners become active creators of their own learning experiences. Brain research on how humans learn supports this. For the sake of our learners, our companies and educational institutions, and our own satisfaction as facilitators of learning, we need to learn other ways of training, ways that engage learners from the moment they walk into the room until the moment they leave.

What can you achieve with this book?

Training from the BACK of the Room! gives you sixty-five ways to step aside and let your learners take center-stage as they discuss, question, reflect, experiment, participate, present, practice, teach, and learn from each other. You'll change the traditional and ineffective "trainers talk; learners listen" paradigm to a more powerful and brain-friendly approach: "When learners talk and teach, they learn." You'll be immersed in a simple, four-step instructional design and delivery process that involves learners every step of the way. You'll explore useful brain research and put to rest some outdated assumptions about how humans learn. In the end, you'll combine all of this to create learning experiences that are profoundly different from traditional instruction.

How is this book organized?

Training from the BACK of the Room! begins with an introduction to the need-to-know information: what's in it for you, current brain research that supports the book's concepts, and the 4

Cs—a brain-friendly instructional design and delivery process. Each of the following four parts of the book gives you definitions, descriptions, and practical training strategies for each step of the 4 Cs:

- Part One: Connections—Fifteen opening activities that connect learners to the topic, to each other, and to what they want and need to learn.
- Part Two: Concepts—Twenty strategies that engage and involve learners during the lecture or “direct instruction” training segment.
- Part Three: Concrete Practice—Fifteen strategies in which learners actively review content and practice new skills.
- Part Four: Conclusions—Fifteen learner-led summaries, evaluations, and celebration activities.

In addition, you, the reader, will be encouraged to participate in short, quick learning activities that you can use with your own training topics. Finally, this book offers a section of nice-to-know information that will add to what you have learned: the secret about adult learning theory, a fresh way approach to learning outcomes, more collaborative learning strategies, tips for interactive e-learning, and great resources to expand your own learning adventure. Welcome to *Training from the BACK of the Room!*

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Essential resources for training and HR professionals

Training from the BACK of the Room!

65
Ways to Step Aside
and Let Them Learn

Sharon L. Bowman

Foreword by Jay Cross

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To my Aunt Marnet,
Margaret Cote,
who did the loving “Mom” things
and persistently pushed me
to write this book.

And to Ross Barnett,
my life mate, helper, encourager, partner,
for everything he is and does,
which makes this work possible.

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Foreword

Sharon Bowman writes about how trainers need to think about learning, plan learning experiences, and deliver the goods in a class or training. Her suggestions are clear, simple, and commonsense. She doesn't get hung up with behaviorism, flow charts, human performance models, levels of evaluation, or complex learning objectives. Her writing is not sufficiently obscure to appeal to doctrinaire instructional designers and academic design gurus. So, if you consider yourself an expert instructional designer, with all the associated jargon, this book is not for you.

Roger Schank has a four-word explanation of what's wrong with training: "It's just like school." School clings to vestiges of a bygone era: Students get the summer off to help bring in the crops. Schools are literally an alternate reality, walled off from the real world to protect their "customers" (aka students), thereby guaranteeing that schools remain "out of it." Teachers coerce pupils to learn rather than motivate them to learn. New graduates find out about the unspoken hoax: Outside of schools, grades are meaningless. Teachers are the font of all the right answers—hardly a stance for developing critical thinking. In the workplace, teamwork is esteemed; in school, learning with others is called cheating.

Training has adopted most of this bad baggage from school. After all, every trainer was brainwashed for a dozen or more years that this is how you learn. An example: Most executives don't realize that there's more to leading learning than gut feel. Trainers can fall into the same trap. A training director told his sales trainers that henceforth their bonuses would be calculated as a percentage of their former trainees' sales. "But we're not responsible for that," they complained. Hello?

Suspend judgment, and go with Sharon and me for a moment. How do people learn? What comes naturally? They discover things. They experiment to see what works. They watch others and mimic them. They converse with their colleagues. They find out what they need to know to get things done. They follow their hearts.

It's time to break the schooling myth and begin doing what it takes to foster learning. It's time to

- *Encourage* discovery and coloring outside the lines.
- *Provide* opportunities to experiment, and don't punish "failures."
- *Enable* people to learn from one another.
- *Provide* challenges to groups, not individuals.
- *Make* time and room for conversation with peers.
- *Provide* resources for people to learn things for themselves.
- *Give* workers the freedom to learn.

This book offers a four-step model for engaging learners, and backs it up with sixty-five specific interventions. It's like a good cookbook. But a good cookbook does not make a good cook. The recipes are here, but they are just the starting point. Every cook tweaks the instructions to get the best from local ingredients. Every trainer will put his or her spin on things; that's what a professional does.

Here's an oversimplification of Sharon's meta-recipe:

- Create engagements that capture the learners' attention.
- Get out of the way; don't try to think for them.
- Encourage people to learn from one another.

Hans Monderman is a Dutch traffic engineer who is gaining fame for what he doesn't do. He's also famous for what he doesn't like: traffic signs. Remove the center line from a country lane, and people drive more safely. Clutter a road with signs and barriers, and people feel sufficiently protected to drive as fast as they like. If you treat people like fools, they act like fools. Take off the training wheels, and they drive like grown-ups. When Monderman's changes sink in, traffic accidents drop 30 percent.

Follow Sharon's advice. Take off the training wheels and entrust people with their own learning. Keep them engaged. You won't lower the traffic accident rate, but I guarantee you'll improve the quality of their learning.

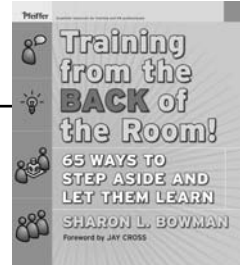
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NEED-to-KNOW

Need-to-Know Information from the *Front of the Book*



Warm-Ups for *Training from the BACK of the Room!*



Welcome to a very different kind of learning experience! Before you begin to read this book, consider doing one or more of the following Warm-Ups, which will give your brain a head start (pun intended) as you explore the concepts and activities in *Training from the BACK of the Room!* Warm-Up activities are explained in detail in Part One. Enjoy the learning!

1. Do a short Internet search for anything related to cognitive neuroscience or how the human brain learns. Write a few notes about your findings and compare the Internet information with what you read in this book. Also make note of the URLs of a few other websites you discover that might be worth exploring.
2. Interview a person who, in your opinion, is an “expert” on any aspect of learning, teaching, or training. Find out what this person thinks is important for you to know about effective training. Compare/contrast what the expert says is important with the concepts in this book. Discuss this comparison with a training colleague.
3. Choose one training book you have already read, and compare the main ideas in that book with the main ideas in this one. Write a summary of your comparison. Share it with a colleague, and discuss whether you agree or disagree with either book’s ideas, and why.
4. Write a quick list of everything you know, or think you know, about the best ways to teach and train. Come back to your list after you’ve read this book, and decide whether or not to change anything you’ve written. You may want to add, delete, or edit items on your list.

The 4 Cs Reference Guide

This is a quick reference guide for the instructional design and delivery model that is the foundation of this book. While reading this book, you will experience this model, even as you learn how to use it in your own training.



Connections



Learners make connections with what they already know or think they know about the training topic, with what they will learn, with what they want to learn, and with each other.



Concepts



Learners take in new information in multisensory ways: hearing, seeing, discussing, writing, reflecting, imagining, participating, and teaching it to others.



Concrete Practice



Learners actively practice the new skills, or they participate in an active review of the new knowledge they have learned.



Conclusions



Learners summarize what they have learned, evaluate it, celebrate it, and create action plans for how they plan to use the new knowledge or skills after the training is over.

What's In It For You?

An Introduction to *Training from the BACK of the Room!*

Put the learner to work.

Michael Allen

Michael Allen's Guide to e-Learning, 2003, p. 161

CONNECTIONS



One-Minute Connection: Fast Pass

Here is the million-dollar training question. Circle your most honest answer, then read what your answer reveals:

What do learners spend most of their time doing during your training programs?

- A. Reading the text, handouts, slides, or manuals
 - B. Listening to you
 - C. Watching visuals on slides, televisions, or computers screens
 - D. Discussing concepts or practicing skills
 - E. Teaching each other and learning from each other
- *For Answer A: Reading the text, handouts, slides, or manuals.* Easy for you, maybe, but too bad for your learners. If you define "learning" as being able to remember and use information in some way, then reading is one of the least effective ways of learning for most people.

(continued)

- *For Answer B: Listening to you.* As interesting as you think your lectures are, most folks remember very little of what they hear, especially if they don't immediately apply the information. Yes, strong auditory learners may be content to simply sit and listen, and sprinkling your lecture with stories, metaphors, analogies and humor definitely makes your message more memorable. But listening doesn't mean learning, even if you entertain while you talk.
- *For Answer C: Watching visuals on slides, televisions, or computers screens.* This is a step up from reading or listening, especially if the media used is saturated with images, such as video-clips, graphics, photos, cartoons, icons, and the like. In this case, information becomes more image-rich, and consequently easier to remember.
- *For Answer D: Discussing concepts or practicing skills.* Now you're heading in the right direction. Any time training participants discuss concepts and practice skills, they dramatically increase learning. Furthermore, they will be able to remember and use the new information for longer periods of time.
- *For Answer E: Teaching each other and learning from each other.* You are light years ahead of most trainers because you know that teaching another person is one of the most powerful ways to learn. When you allow learners to teach each other, and learn from each other, they increase their own confidence, competence, and ability to use—and master—what they have learned.

Allowing learners to be active participants in their own learning is what this book is about. If you already involve learners from the moment they walk into the room until the moment they leave, you will use this book as a resource to enhance what you are doing well. If you aren't engaging learners throughout the entire training process, you will use this book to learn how to train from the *back* of the room, as you step aside and allow learners to take charge of their own learning.

Imagine That ...

You just completed a three-day train-the-trainer program in which you learned how to design and deliver effective training. But you didn't learn sitting down. Nor did you learn by passively listening to a lecture while watching a series of

PowerPoint® slides. Instead, you participated in short, quick learning activities from the moment you walked into the room until the end of the training. Most of what you learned was a result of participating in collaborative activities with other learners. Occasionally, the instructor, Marcia, spoke for about ten minutes while you wrote main ideas on note-taking pages that included cartoons, photos, and other topic-related images. A quick review activity followed each ten-minute lecture segment.

You noticed a number of unusual things. For example, Marcia often stood in back of the room while you and the other training participants took “center stage.” At various time during the training, different table groups stood in the front of the room and led a presentation, discussion, or an activity that introduced new concepts. You focused most of your attention on the other participants as you learned from, and taught, each other the train-the-trainer content.

You also noticed that Marcia practiced what she preached. She never told you something was important and then didn’t give you time to practice it. Nor did she bore you with dozens of slides, while telling you not to bore your training participants.

The most important thing you observed was that Marcia didn’t act as if she were the only one who knew the content and all you had to do was show up and listen. Instead, she gave you and the other participants plenty of opportunities to talk about what you already knew about effective training, and to network and share best practices with each other. You worked hard and learned an immense amount of new information because you were actively involved every step of the way.



CONCEPTS

Do You Want Them to *Hear* It or *Learn* It?

This is the second million-dollar question, and probably the most important one you will ever ask yourself as a trainer: “*Do I want them to HEAR it, or do I want them to LEARN it?*” Your answer to this question is crucial, as it will impact the effectiveness of every training program you design and deliver.

If covering content is your goal, then lecturing is the quickest, easiest, and most time-efficient way of doing that. After all, learning isn't the main objective; presenting the content to your learners is.

But if *learning* is your goal, that is, enabling learners to remember and use the information you give them, then listening to you won't get them there. What *will* get them there is involvement and engagement during the entire training—high interest, content-related, physically active involvement—where they are teaching and learning from each other. That's exactly what this book will help you accomplish.

Who's Doing the Talking?

If you truly want your training participants to be able to remember and use the concepts from your training, you will ask yourself one final million-dollar question: *"In my training programs, who is doing most of the talking?"*

It takes a strong dose of honesty to answer this question, because most trainers think they spend little time lecturing when the statistics show the opposite. According to research from a variety of Internet articles on the topic, most trainers spend about two-thirds of a training program lecturing, even when they don't think they are doing all the talking. "Indeed, almost everyone seems to have the tendency to launch into content presentation as the natural, appropriate, and most essential thing to do" (Allen, 2003, p. 189).

Try This

Time It. The next time you attend any kind of adult learning function—a presentation, conference session, class, workshop, or training—make a note of the total amount of time the presenter or trainer talks, versus the amount of time you and the other participants talk. How close to the two-thirds figure does the trainer come? However well-intentioned or interesting the trainer is, he is *not* focused on learning if he is doing most, or all, of the talking. There is no judgment in saying this. Not all adult learning functions are really about learning; many are about content delivery only. You need to know the difference, and then make sure that your training programs are learning experiences instead of content-delivery experiences.