The Magic of Making Training FUN !!®

I. Why FUN?

Does a FUN session bring to mind the picture of a group of learners laughing so hard they can hardly remain seated in their chairs? Not a bad idea, considering we could all do with some laughs, but that is not exactly what we have in mind. We are thinking of FUN as a much more serious concept, one where we hope to bring back into the training session the sense of wonder, exploration, and discovery which we somehow lost progressively as we left childhood.

When we think of the traditional classroom or training session, what comes to mind is the yawning gap between the deep engrossment of a child in the midst of a discovery and the 'when will this end' expressions of adult learners forced into the room by corporate training plans and held imprisoned by learning strategies wholly out of place for adults.

Training aims to address gaps in knowledge, skills, and attitude which adversely affect performance. For training to achieve its ends, it has to meet certain requirements:

• **P**erformance: Training should result in performance. Towards this end it should motivate and support transfer of learning to the workplace. For performance to happen, we need to focus on attention, comprehension, and retention.
• **A**ttention: Training should hold the attention of its audience.
• **C**omprehension: Training should enable learners to comprehend what is being taught.
• **E**nsuring retention: Training should ensure that learning is retained for application.

Traditional learning falters in gaining learners' attention, and in ensuring their comprehension and retention. Hence it fails to deliver on its goal – performance – thus calling to question its effectiveness.

We thought long and hard about what can be done about the corporate training situation which has long ignored the writing on the wall that said "just because we have said it, it doesn't mean they have got it." And FUN is what we came up with.

II. What is FUN?

Put simply, FUN refers to those activities through which learners comprehend existing knowledge or create new knowledge through active experiences and interactions with fellow learners and the facilitator.

In FUN learning, we create situations that people intrinsically enjoy. We enjoy sharing experiences; we enjoy puzzles, jokes, and stories; and there is still so much of the child in us that all of us cherish the challenge and competition of a game. There is much that we learn from these, though not in a deliberate, conscious way.

III. FUN and 5I's

FUN is a catalyst and an enabler for learning. It is a vehicle to deliver content. FUN training is based on 5 principles called as 5 I's since all of them start with the letter 'I'. The various concepts and techniques in FUN draw their significance from one or the other of these 5 I's.

Introduction: This is that critical stage where first impressions make a difference. We appreciate a warm welcome at any place we go to and the training room is no different. This is the stage where learners and the trainer, till then possibly a disparate group, come together and begin to form a bond and a rapport.

Involvement: Learners come in as a preoccupied group, still carrying the worries of the outside world into the training room. Involvement serves the purpose of addressing their preoccupation and getting them 'ready' to accept content.

Interaction: The degree of learning that can happen in an environment where the experiences of many are pooled is greater than what can happen when the trainer 'tells'. Adult learners learn from sharing and processing experiences. This creates in them an ownership for the learning.

Instruction: We know that there is much of content to be covered in a training session, and given that there is only so much of time available to do that, the tendency is to break into a continuous lecture. In FUN training, we look at alternative ways of imparting skill and knowledge, which takes into account the need for moderate content, the adult attention span, and the possibilities in learner driven methods.

Intensifying Retention: While the trainer cannot ensure transfer of learning to the workplace, he or she can certainly ensure top of the mind recall of what has been learned during the session so that citing "I don't remember what was being talked about in the session," is not what is standing in the way of application of learning. Von Restroff has said that a different processing of an item ensures it a firmer place in memory. So we use various activities to ensure that learners repeatedly register content which might otherwise have been lost because of lack of attention paid to it.

A FUN facilitator is one who uses all these 5 I's effectively.

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IV. FUN and adult learning principles

Reflecting on why FUN methods succeed where traditional methods fail, we need to review the aptly titled book by Malcolm Knowles: "The Adult Learner, a Neglected Species." In a nutshell, the principles say that adults like to know the relevance of what they are learning. They have already learned much and experienced much; therefore it is easiest to learn when the new knowledge is linked to what they already know, in ways that are enjoyable. Children, Knowles said, learn from experiences; adults are a result of experiences.

V. FUN is no laughing matter

While so much has been said about laughter and FUN learning, do not mistake a FUN facilitator to be a stand-up comedian. FUN is not an end in itself, and the purpose of its use is not to make people laugh. It is a serious and structured way of facilitating, which nonetheless is entertaining and enjoyable because of the use of techniques like warm ups, learning tournaments, frame jokes, mind maps, symbolic charades, rewards etc.

VI. Caution while using FUN techniques

Can FUN techniques be used across the board with all kinds of learner groups? The answer is 'no'. The FUN facilitator has to take into consideration what is acceptable in terms of cultural and group norms. A warm up that works well in an American context may not go down well with an Asian audience. Similarly, a group of senior civil servants may find it patronising if made to run around with balloons at a warm up session unlike a sales team, who may enthusiastically take to it.

VII. FUN and the 12 Guiding Principles
12 guiding principles need to be considered while using FUN techniques:

Learner issues
- Learner experience: Tap into the prior experiences of learners as a rich resource to enable new learning.
- Learner diversity: Take into consideration the differences in learning styles and preferences.
- Learner readiness: Establish a conducive learning climate for learners to receive content.

Content issues
- Moderate content: Remember that the lack of time to cover the syllabus does not justify the dumping of content on the learners. Dumping content on learners may lead to their dumping the content.

- Subject matter differences: Use training techniques appropriate to the content.
- Knowledge-skill balance: For real world applications, balance knowledge inputs with opportunities for skills practice.

Approach issues

- Attention span: Adult learners find it difficult to concentrate for more than 20 minutes. So, chunk content into 20 minute bits.
- Group and cultural norms: Adapt techniques and tools to suit the audience to avoid resistance.
- Variety: Spice up your learning sessions and eliminate boredom by using a variety of training techniques and learning tools.
- Applications in the real world: Your learners need a convincing answer in terms of what will benefit them i. e. What's In It For Me. (WIIFM)
- Small group learning: Create threat-free learning environment where participation is encouraged.
- Frequent reviews: If you make your adult learners review learning many times they might not appreciate it, particularly when it is done in a mundane and routine way. Use a variety of competitive games, and other FUN tools for the purpose of review without necessarily referring to them as 'review'.

Go ahead, let the Magic of FUN transform your training!!

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