

# 12 Techniques to Motivate and Engage our Teachers (6 Proven Tricks and 6 Quick Tips)

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Motivating teachers is difficult. We don't always make the best students. Like doctors often make challenging patients and mechanics often drive cars in desperate need of a tune up, teachers as a group tend to be reluctant passengers on the training journey. I too remember a day, a lifetime ago, hold up on a pupil free day, in some behaviour management workshop doing the umpteenth role play with a presenter that was the educational equivalent of Ambien. The delivery was poor, the match for our needs was worse and unfortunately for all concerned the disengagement was extreme.

So how do we create dynamic training which gets the most of our participants and encourages them to get the best out of themselves? When preparing for this article I contacted some old teacher buddies and asked them two simple questions: *what turns you on and what turns you off professional development training in your schools?* Overwhelming the response came back that the training has to be relevant to them and it has to honour their existing experience. This seemed like a good place to start.

## **1. Keeping it Real! (And Relevant)**

The key to engaging the audience is finding the balance between attraction and distraction. Essentially we want to distract them *to* our training, not distract them *from* our training. One way to do this is to issue a "keeping it real" card to each participant. The front of the card actually says "KEEPING IT REAL" and the back of the card is for "action points". Explain to your group that the card serves two purposes. Firstly, you will encourage them to write some action points for implementation post-course during the session. This ensures that they are taking things from the workshop that they can apply straight away. Secondly, if the presenter stays from relevance, the participants are instructed to hold up the side that says "KEEPING IT REAL". This is surprisingly fun and keeps both the trainer and the participants on their toes. It also gives some control back to the participants and supports a certain buy-in to the workshop.

I often use the analogy of training being similar to walking into a retail store. If a salesperson comes up to us too early, we will put our "just looking" barriers up. If they don't come quick enough, we get

frustrated and disinterested. This is a lot like the classroom – participants will often put their “just looking” barriers up until they feel comfortable in the space and trust in the transaction. Similarly if they are not involved or engaged in participation, they will lose interest and we can’t “sell” our content.

So rather than beating the group into submission with a content heavy introduction, followed by a dozen slides outlining all that needs to be covered, perhaps a well timed ice-breaker or activity could get the buy-in you need and set the scene for a successful day of delivery.

## **2. Games with Frontiers**

I often get asked, “aren’t games just a waste of time?” Well my short answer is no! However, my considered rejoinder to this is: **the right games, used correctly with the right audience will enhance the content and promote learning.** Of course if you open your copy of *101 Games that Trainers Play*, then close your eyes and randomly pick an activity for the day, you are unlikely to get bang for your buck. Teachers will spot a time-waster a mile away, so games for the sake of playing games is never a good idea. The key is selecting activities to complement or partner the material to assist the participants in making the necessary connections. In most situations, a carefully selected game will support the trainer in attracting and maintaining interest in their session. If they are not playing they are straying, so you need to find the ying and yang relationship of content and supporting activity. Games are not the antithesis of content. They help to challenge, reinforce, persuade, refocus and reassure participants. Remember, we want to captivate the audience, not hold them captive!

If 100 years of mass schooling has taught us anything, it is that teachers like their structure. As such, quiz show style Q & A (e.g. Millionaire, Jeopardy, the Rich List) can be a fun way of revisiting material or checking for understanding. Similarly, checklist tasks can motivate your participants as they can see the relationship between the activity and the outcome.

Recently, I did an activity with a group of school teachers around the concept of “continuous improvement”. I divided the group into teams of 3 or 4 and gave each team a packet of drinking straws. I told them that they had to build a structure using only the straws and this structure had to support the weight of a full 375ml can of soft drink. The instructions were basic, but each team busied themselves with the task, with varying success. After their first attempt I asked them to review their design and make a list of improvements. Next, I gave them a checklist of the kind of things that should be included in a successful design and asked them to review their design again. Finally I gave them a copy of an engineer-created design to benchmark their

own design. This activity provided high involvement and engagement and helped to illustrate the benefit of different review methods; namely, self-assessment, audit and benchmarking.

### **3. Use Tactile Learning Tools**

For decades students have been lambasted for fiddling and doodling in class. Often seen as a sign of distraction and inattention, these practices have been all but outlawed in traditional education circles. However, when used correctly, they can actually be very powerful learning tools. Some learners will need to keep something in motion throughout their interaction with the content and asking them to change is like asking them to stop breathing.

Place some tactile learning tools (toys, stress balls, puzzles, highlighters, interestingly-shaped items) out on the tables or in a basket out the front of the room and invite learners to take one. Whilst they might be uncertain at first, the inquisitive types will get things moving. During the session encourage the participants to try different ones or swap with others at their table. At the end of the session you may want to debrief by asking if they helped. Additionally, you could engage in a discussion around which ones worked better than others and why? There are many benefits to using tactile learning tools through your sessions. They can relieve stress, improve focus, create a sense of calm and promote a creative and playful mindset. These sorts of tactile aids cross-over age and gender boundaries and often result in more collaborative behaviour.

### **4. Find the Comfort Zone**

Since motivation is not intrinsic for every participant, trainers can be challenged to find new ways to motivate them. The secret is in creating a safe and supportive environment. I think it is important to realise that our participants need to find their comfort zone - that set of boundaries where an individual feels safe. In order to engage, participants need to know they are not threatened. Many of our teachers have been through ineffective mandatory training in the past and can be skeptical of the trainer's agenda or guarded in their interactions. Although, risk is where learning happens and we need our participants to take risks in order to get the most out of the training. However, they are disinclined to take these risks when they feel threatened. This is where we can acknowledge the experience in the room. A simple way of doing this is by counting up the years of teaching experience in the room and stating something like "with 172 years of experience, we should be able to find the answers we are looking for".

### **5. Deal with the Dominator**

The dominator can be characterised as someone who drives conversations, is quick to answer questions presented to the group,

provides additional information unprompted and speaks over others to get their message across. Now we often need these kinds of self-starters or devil's advocates to lead the group during our training. However, it mustn't be at the detriment of the other candidates.

One technique to give the rest of the group their voice back and to balance the interaction, is to invite the "dominator" to be a scribe on the board. The dynamic thus changes from being active in discussion to being active in writing and consequently others have an opportunity to make a contribution, without competing with the "dominator". The time out the front will also support the "dominator's" need to for attention. At the end of the discussion or brainstorm, you could invite some final responses from the scribe, which gives them their chance to provide input. Whilst, you can't use this technique all the time, it may allow you to give some respite to your groups from the influence of a dominator!

## **6. Web 2.0 Implications: Be a Technology Trailblazer - not blaze trailer**

In general, it seems that educators as a group are slow to adopt new technologies as invariably they conflict with the "cannon of convention". There is often push back to justify the cost and criticism from others that say it is only the "latest fad" and will pass. However, there is a growing population of teachers who are embracing the technologies both personally and professionally and building their personal learning network (PLN) online. Our major universities are also producing tech-savvy graduates eager to implement their innovative ICTs and there is a wave of support for digital pedagogy finding its way on the government agenda. Therefore, our training should incorporate options for technology integration.

One activity I use is a "Five Live Quiz". After some content, you divide the participants into smaller groups and give them a list of questions. However, they have to use at least five different sources for finding the answers:

1. Class notes
2. Phone a friend outside of the room
3. Send an email to someone outside of the room
4. Use a smart phone to Google it
5. Post a question online via a blog, bulletin board or social media site

To add some urgency and an element of fun, you can give a prize to the group who finishes first! This activity will show how quickly information can be discovered and how truly connected we all are.

Let's face it, our participants are more connected than they have ever been. And just like Blackberries transformed the boardroom, smart phones and other wifi-enabled devices will transform the classroom. Today a whole reference collection can be accessed from a single handheld device and can be updated at a fraction of the cost of traditional collections. Half a billion people access Facebook and MySpace... that is potentially 500,000,000 more people to ask questions of and have questions posed from. We are not the gatekeepers of knowledge any more. We are the tour guides connecting people with the right experiences, helping them to navigate their way to the best destination.

Be the trailblazer, not the blaze trailer in your training. Try new things, test applications, ask participants how they would like to connect, consider multiple platforms of delivery, have the courage to extend yourself. You will be glad you did!

## **6 QUICK TIPS**

Training Tip #1: An Introduction should orient the audience to the context, purpose and direction of the session.

Training Tip #2: Slides should be easy to read and easy to navigate. Too many bells and whistles will detract from content! Remember, we don't want to kill them (Micro)softly.

Training Tip #3: Encourage participants to jot down additional notes to promote reinforcement and to create an enduring resource for later referral.

Training Tip #4: Ask participants to highlight pertinent points on their handout - this helps to reinforce content and makes later reference easier.

Training Tip #5: Use relevant anecdotes and examples to reinforce points and make the content real!

Training Tip #6: A fun quiz in the end of the session helps to reinforce content and supports checking for understanding.



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