



Converting Workplace Training into Fun

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Understand how training can include the use of humor and games
- ✓ Explore different types of games
- ✓ Identify methods to elicit participant buy-in

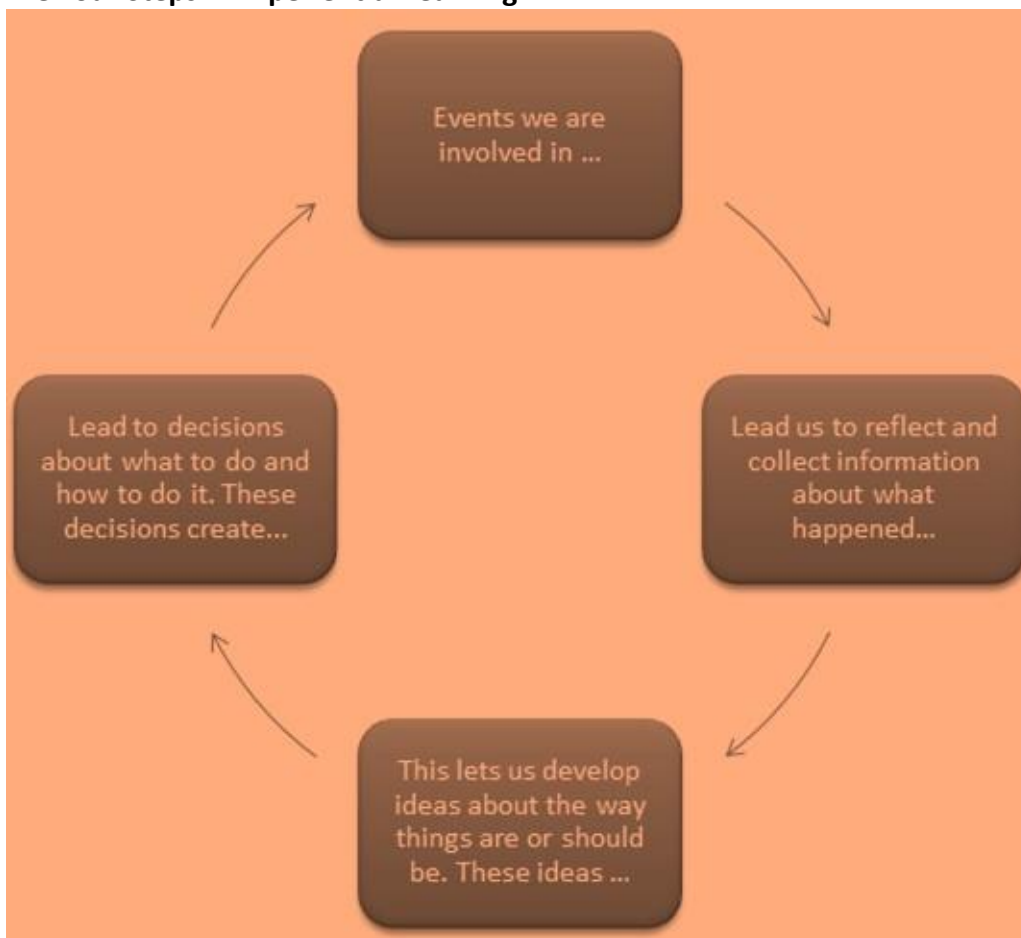
Unit

Converting Workplace Training into fun

Let's Have Some Fun!

Background Information

The Four Steps in Experiential Learning



The Principles of Adult Learning

- We learn to do by doing.
- We have five senses.
- We learn when we are ready to learn.
- We make connections.

- We learn one thing at a time.
- We learn more rapidly when results are satisfying to us.
- We need to understand what we learn.
- We develop skill through practice.
- We differ from one another in abilities and background.

The Value of Games

Not every game will work with every group. Knowing your audience will help you select the right activities. There are different types of games and activities that serve different purposes.

An **energizer** is meant to increase the energy within the group and a room. Energizers are great in that post-lunch, getting drowsy period.

Icebreakers are designed to help people connect to each other and the training objectives. They get people interacting with each other and make people more receptive to learning. Icebreakers should also lead into the topic material.

There are also more **formal games** that allow teams or individuals to enter into some kind of competition. Care in setting up competitive games is important so that no participants feel inferior or turned off from training. It really depends on the value that you are looking for in your session, and the learning objectives.

Late in the day when people are becoming tired or restless may not be the best time for a really active game, but it is always helpful to have a few extra energizers or **stretches** in mind to keep people engaged and interested in the program.

Tips for Success

A game that falls flat can spoil an entire training day, so it is important that the facilitator consider the following tips.

First and foremost, **don't select activities that would annoy you** if you were a participant. Try them out with your family or children first.

As well, make sure that you **adjust the length and type of game** to suit the length of the session. A one-day workshop probably does not benefit from a 45 minute game; a two to five minute icebreaker is probably just fine. However, if your group is taking part in a multi-day workshop and would benefit from getting to know one another really well, then an extensive game of up to an hour is appropriate.

Always **know your audience**. You could develop a short quiz for the participants to complete anonymously before training to assess their comfort level, how well they know other participants, and so on. You could also speak with their managers or former trainers.

Generally speaking, more senior staff will not be willing to look silly or foolish in front of their own subordinates. Junior staff may not be comfortable looking silly in front of their boss. In addition, if participants arrive in business clothes, they may not be comfortable with really active games.

The content of the workshop needs to be a consideration, too. If you are providing introductions and icebreakers for a day consisting of meetings or sessions about layoffs, downsizing, or change, you will need to select your games accordingly.

Learning that deals with “soft skill” subjects such as communication or team building will **benefit from games** more than one that focuses on learning computer software, for example. The software group, however, might really need some kind of energizer as an energy infuser at some point, or even several times, during the day.

People who know each other very well will find some exercises **redundant**. If the group knows each other well, you need to be more selective in the games that you choose. If you are facilitating for people from different organizations, then they will benefit from getting to know each other better.

Favorite Games

Describe your favorite game in one to two minutes. Record any notes here.

Do you have examples of icebreakers, energizers, or games that fizzled?

handout, or on a flip chart. Participants who do not clearly see objectives stated may put up resistance to taking part in training if they cannot recognize the value easily.

Rules

Even when we are having fun, it is important that there are some rules for behavior established early in the workshop. (Rules can actually be even more important when we are having fun!) The rules can be generated by participants (which can help with buy-in) or by the facilitator. Keep the list of rules short. Most rules that your participants generate will actually relate to respect for others.

The three key rules are:

- **Respect for others.** This includes arriving on time, not holding sidebar conversations, letting everyone speak, turning cell phones off, and not being the center of attention.
- **Having fun.** This includes enjoying the day, not picking on others, and freedom to explore and try out new ideas.
- **What takes place in the workshop stays in the workshop.** This is so that comments about the workplace, a particular person, or how funny someone might have been in the workshop, are not spread through the workplace as gossip following the session. This will help participants take risks during the training.

These rules can certainly have a fun slant to them if you word them with a little creativity. For example, rule number three can be re-worded with the well-known phrase, “what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.”

Preparation

Workshop participants will forgive many things, but a lack of preparation is not one of them. If you plan to have a day that flows smoothly, then you must do an excellent job of preparing your material. When a facilitator uses a fast paced game but has to frequently refer to their notes, the energy flow of the activity is interrupted and participants may lose interest. Similarly, if you plan to use a game but forget your props or run into technical difficulty at the last second (i.e. forgot to bring prizes or bean bags, or you are unable to find a switch to dim the lights or close the blinds), your fun activity could turn into a flop.

Prepare, prepare, prepare!

Learning From the Truly Greats and Big Mistakes

What made your favorite workshops great?

Have you ever experienced a disastrous workshop or a facilitator who was not prepared?

What value did you leave either workshop with?

Choosing the Right Game

Types of Games

Choosing the Right Game

Choosing the right activity is really important. Since it can be hard to make dry topics engaging, or you may run into groups who have a lot of tension about “games” at work, you may want to refer to games as activities. Keep in mind that you also have to deliver a meaningful workshop for your clients or boss.

One of the signs of a good trainer is being able to choose and modify a game to fit the situation. A good resource library of games is important so that you don't find yourself re-using a few games over and over, especially if you are an in-house trainer developing workshops for the same people.

There are lots of excellent books available as well as ideas on the Internet. Check with your local library or bookstore, or do an online search for training games. You can also ask other trainers about games that have worked well for them.

Although "game" is kind of a broad term, below are some loose definitions that might help you select the right activity for the objectives that you have set. Some of these headings overlap, as you will see. The definitions are here to give us a better understanding of the range of activities that we may want to apply when we are injecting some fun into our training.

Game

A game is an exercise that normally has a set of rules and an element of competition. Games also normally include some element of reward or pay off. Although traditional games include competing against someone or another team, they are also many non-competitive games available. Games can include physical challenges, intellectual skills, or chance.

Icebreakers

Icebreakers are normally used as an exercise to introduce group members to one another, infuse some energy into the beginning of a workshop, and/or to lead into the topic material. They are also an effective way to reduce tension between participants or tension about a difficult topic.

Depending on the length of your workshop, an icebreaker for a day-long event might be five to ten minutes. For longer training, where it is important that participants really get to know one another, an initial icebreaker might be a half hour to an hour and a half.

Energizer

An energizer is a brief pick-me-up designed to invigorate a group if energy in the room is waning, or to bring them back together following a break. Energizers may be a short version of any game or icebreaker, or a brief set of stretches. They are completed within approximately two to five minutes.

Simulations

A simulation is used to train future operators when the equipment that they will use is either very expensive or dangerous. Simulations are designed to be as realistic as possible so that participants can learn from the situation without worrying about damage or financial cost. Examples of simulations include flight simulators, driving simulators, or war games.

Brain Teasers

Not really a game and not exactly a simulation, brain teasers are puzzles to keep participants busy or to highlight key points. Brain teasers have the flexibility for a creative trainer to create their own rules to fit a particular session. They can include perception exercises, joining the dots, or drawing activities.

Role Plays

Role-playing is a helpful way to gauge how participants are learning material or how they react to certain situations. They are very useful way to practice new skills in a non-threatening environment, where a participant learns to apply behavioral or speaking techniques to a situation and gets feedback without making a mistake in front of their own customers or clients. Role-plays can be helpful in teaching conflict management, counseling, sales, negotiating, and many other skills.

Case Studies

Case studies are stories normally extracted from a participant's workplace or industry. It may also be a simulated scenario. They may be studied by individuals or groups and then analyzed to demonstrate particular training points or to stimulate discussion.

Facilitator Responsibilities

Your responsibilities as a facilitator include **keeping your participants engaged**. No matter how brilliant we think we are, people are able to think much more quickly than we can talk, so it can be challenging to keep a group engaged.

Since training is a very serious business, the use of games and related activities should all reflect the **principles of adult learning**. As a facilitator, you need to make sure that your participants do not become so engrossed in an activity that they miss the learning objectives. You must also recognize that games, simulations, role plays, and related activities can speed up the learning process and reinforce the course objectives.

It is equally important that you **debrief** the group on every exercise that you conduct. First, you need to ensure that the exercise is linked to the objectives and that participants understand the goal that was set. Second, and perhaps more importantly, you are responsible for keeping your group united. Although you will always establish your training as taking place in a safe environment, some exercises can take a group through self-disclosure or risk taking that may leave them feeling out of sorts or very uncomfortable.

Debriefing allows the opportunity for participants to get their feelings out in the open and to question the process or outcomes while the activity is fresh in their mind and they remain within the safety of the training room. Debriefing also allows everyone, including the trainer, to talk about the outcomes of the exercise. Was it what everyone expected? Would it apply in a real situation? How would you have responded if this had happened?

Dealing with Reluctant Participants

What kind of games would you plan to use for reluctant participants? (For example, think of a group of trainees who all work for the same employer and are forced to attend a mandatory refresher course.) Why?

What kind of games would you plan to use for people who do not like playing games? Why?

How do you coerce people who refuse to play or interact with the group?

When Games Go Badly

Troubleshooting Games

Despite our best intentions and planning, sometimes a game won't work. It may be that the group is not quite the right size, or that you have a group that resists game playing or creativity. Your room could have been changed at the last moment and now there are pillars obstructing the space, or you could be unable to close the blinds so that the projector shows up properly. You may also be getting some insensitivity from some participants: someone may be monopolizing the conversation, not listening and then jumping into the conversation, or may be disrupting the group by making or receiving phone calls or returning late from breaks.

These sorts of inconveniences can happen in any training session. Although they are reduced if you have taken time to establish some rules for behavior in the introduction to your training, a trainer who is flexible and adaptable can handle them with ease and grace.

When a game does not work, the most straightforward remedy is for the trainer to be honest and sincere about the problem. You could say something like, "I have to apologize everyone. That game has worked for me before, but today it is not giving us what we need," or "Well, here is a great training lesson for all of us – some games just fizzle! I am sorry that we did not get the results that were intended, so I'd like to make it up to you by offering you a five minute stretch break and time to refill your water glasses while I fix the projector."

You get the idea. **Be honest and keep the tone light,** and the effects of the disaster will dissipate quickly. You can also offer a debriefing aspect, especially in a train-the-trainer situation, and ask the group how they would avoid that problem in the future or restructure that part of the training.

Difficult Situations

What would you do if the group is too tired to think through a difficult activity?

What would you do if the group is overdressed for an active energizer?

Use this chart to record any other situations and solutions.

Difficult Situation	Suggested Solution

Further Reading:

- ✓ *Charney, Cy, and Kathy Conway. The Trainer's Tool Kit. AMACOM, 2005.*
- ✓ *Kroehnert, Gary. 101 More Training Games. McGraw-Hill, 1999.*
- ✓ *Stevenson, Doug. How to Write and Deliver a Dynamite Speech. Cornelia Press, 2006.*