

The Case for Making Training FUN!

Is the use of FUN something that trainers, facilitators or learning specialists can avoid without affecting learning results? Research shows us that it is highly unlikely for great learning results when the delivery is devoid of FUN.

In my 30 over years of experience in delivering sessions and attending training, I have found the use of FUN to be a very powerful tool to gain learner *attention*, promote *participation* and accelerate *retention*. The resistance towards the use of FUN tools may largely be attributed towards the stereotyped perceptions of FUN. Many years ago, the late Dr. Surjit Singh, a Malaysian trainer, differentiated the use of FUN and being funny in a jovial manner. Rather than share the lengthy research background, suffice to say for now, we can certainly say the use of FUN is a purpose driven activity; being funny is largely trivial without a purpose, when taken in the context of learning. How many times have we heard participants murmuring that while the trainer is a content expert and is very knowledgeable, the sessions are very hard to pay attention to? We have also heard learners grumbling about all funny activities and jokes without any relevance to content.

Professor Thiagi, *Workshops by Thiagi* says games when used with a clear objective accelerate learning. Ed Scannel, the co-author of *Games Trainers Play* series says games improve learner attention. Bob Pike from *Creative Training Techniques* says the use of learner centred tools accelerates learner participation. The legendary Don Kirkpatrick, the author of the famous *Four Level evaluation framework* gains the attention of every single participant, even when the audience is well over 2000 despite using the obsolete overhead projector.

The careful use of humour and stories makes sessions FUN. Participants get the content in a much shorter time and remember it as well. Yet, the use of FUN tools in training has not yet become part of the trainer, facilitator or learning specialist's tool kit.

Many of those in the profession of helping people learn see FUN as a nice to have element. It is not seen as a must have component. Very few corporate trainers are evaluated on the use of FUN in training. Yet, without FUN and humour, training sessions are at best **telling** sessions.

To overcome some of the prejudices surrounding FUN, let us address some of the myths:

1. Myth One: Adding FUN compromises the content

FUN is a vehicle to deliver content. The careful use – not the misuse or abuse – of FUN transports content much more effectively. The formula $FUN \times Content = Results^{\circledR}$ is a powerful one. Synonymous to an algebraic equation, the absence of either one results in failed learning. The balance between the two will largely depend on the audience. Adding FUN accelerates the delivery of content to the intended recipient much faster and more effectively,

2. Myth Two: Adding FUN devalues the training process

A successful training session largely depends on the process rather than the content. The founder of Toastmasters International, Dr Ralph Smedley said “*people learn most in moments of enjoyment,*” There could be no disagreements with that statement. Yet, many trainers have problems with the use of FUN. Great learning is always the result of involvement with the content. That comes with great interest fuelled by intense like and enjoyment. Learners today are used to being presented content in a variety of ways and formats. The addition of FUN **introduces** the content and **involves** the learner; it engages them in the learning.

3. Myth Three: Adding FUN makes me an entertainer not a trainer

There are many who say - I am a trainer not a comedian. My role is to teach or train not tell jokes. Yet, on a daily basis, most of us add humour into our daily interactions with people. You do not have to be a comedian to add FUN. Telling jokes alone is not FUN. Explore your style of FUN, look at your learners and be what you are. This way, you can build your self confidence. Creating an **interactive** atmosphere for learning is the key. It is this atmosphere that makes sessions *interactive* and *instructional*. The quickest way to create a FUN atmosphere is to show your learners you don't take yourself seriously but you take the role of delivering the content to them very seriously.

4. Myth Four: Adding FUN takes away time from content delivery

The use of FUN takes time but just consider the alternative scenario. You deliver the prescribed content within the time but no one gets it. You have passengers not learners. Adding FUN enables the content to be delivered to the learners using a variety of tools. This helps address different learning styles. Formative assessments can be done without intimidating the learners. Crosswords, learning tournaments and Bingos are some tools that help **intensify learner retention**.

5. Myth Five: Adding FUN does not result in learning

Mel Silberman, the author of *Active Training* says learners think much faster than the speed with which the trainer speaks. The need to engage the learners and grab their attention for improved learning results becomes critical. With attention spans decreasing from the much touted twenty minutes to probably less than five minutes with the Gen Y learners today, we have to do all that is necessary to gain attention for learning to take place.

John Cleese, the mega star of training videos produced by Video Arts said “If I can make you laugh with me, you like me better, which makes you more open to my ideas. And if I can get you to laugh at a particular point that I make, by laughing at it, you acknowledge it as truth.”

In this way, use of FUN tools helps you to accelerate learning results.

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