What makes an ideal trainer?

Research shows that trainers like to train in the way that they would personally like to learn. Dr Clare Howard of Academy28 highlights how trainers can flex their preferred 'style' to match that of their training group.

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What 'type' of trainer are you?

Is there such a thing as an ideal 'type' of trainer?

Theories based on the work of Carl Gustav Jung, the Swiss psychiatrist and founder of analytical psychology, tell us that the personal style of each individual reveals itself in four main areas.

1. The first is ***Energy*** (whether you are active and like to talk things out or reflective and prefer to think things through).

2. The second relates to ***Content and information*** (whether you prefer facts, details and specifics or ideas, patterns and possibilities).

3. The third relates to ***Conclusions and the basis for decisions*** (whether you are objective and solution-focused or subjective and people-focused).

4. The last is about ***Commitment and personal organisation*** (are you structured, planned and organised or are you more flexible and prepared to go with the flow?).

This is of course true for learners as well as trainers. Ideally, the personal style of a trainer should match those of their trainees. However, there are 16 distinct personality 'types'. So, a typical training group of 10-12 participants is likely to be made up of at least six different personalities. But when the trainer matches their style to that of their training group, the trainees enter a 'learning zone', where fast and effective learning happens. If the trainer gets it wrong - there can be trouble.

The research

A good trainer should be able to put aside their own stereotypes and prejudices and embrace the contributions of diversity in the make-up of their trainees.

In 2006 we ran a research project with over 100 trainers to assess how much their preferences for 26 different learning activities matched the style they adopted as a trainer.

Overall, the less experienced the trainer, the more they were likely to choose instructional methods that fitted with their own preferences. We found that 85 per cent of respondents train using over 80 per cent of the activities with which they like to learn.

The research also analysed the trainers according to their temperaments. There are four temperaments: **Rational** (who value competency and are curious about theory); **Idealist** (who value making the world a better place for others by helping the learner); **Guardian** (who like having a list to study and who then get on with it) and **Artisan** (who just like to do the job in their own way).

Idealist trainers - who want to 'make the world a better place for everyone' - are most likely to stick to their own preferred way of learning in their training approach. They may even be dismissive of activities outside of their comfort zone that may actually be preferred by the training group. Ironically, many management trainers are Idealists, whereas managers in organisations usually are not. This can create potential 'trouble in the training room', leading to a demotivated training group and ineffective learning.

Conversely, those with a Rational or Guardian temperaments are much less likely to dismiss

training activities with which they are less comfortable.

Implications

The implications of this are that trainers should aim to quickly identify the behavioural preferences of their trainees. They should match their energy and approach to that of the trainees to ensure engagement. They should present content in ways that hook into the preferred focus and 'agenda' of the trainees and they should challenge learners to move outside of their personal comfort zone.

In practical terms this means getting the active extraverts to sit on their hands and reflect; getting the reflective thinkers to open up and share their thoughts; getting the detail conscious to engage in some blue sky thinking and getting big picture thinkers to get down to reality.

No wonder a training room can seem a formidable place, when these conflicting preferences and needs have to be managed by the trainer.

Experienced trainers will often incorporate a range of activities and approaches into their training. Many of these fit with different learning preferences. But the trainer has to remember that what's 'music to the ears' of one person can be a discordant cacophony to another.

Active, people-oriented trainees will often be the first to volunteer to do a presentation, or jump into a role play. But a reflective, logical, thinking participant will feel that a role play is a waste of time, although they'd be much happier in the observer role.

If trainers know more about the learning preferences of their groups, they can flex their own training style to improve the learning for everyone. Trainers and trainees can quickly and easily identify their type using a simple online assessment that generates an instant report on their personal style and behavioural characteristics - and provides the trainer with a summary of the implications.

However, flexing your own style is not easy, as it involves a high level of observation, concentration and the application of 'conscious competence' to switch your behaviour during a training programme.

Conclusions

As well as using the insights of personality preferences in the training room, we need to use the same principles to inform training design and provide ongoing support for the implementation of learning. Insights from personality preferences in explaining and observing human behaviour patterns are woefully missing from the mainstream of the training world, as most current learning styles, theories and models fail to take these preferences into account.

So whereas it would be wrong to say there's an 'ideal profile' for a trainer, it's essential that a trainer understands the differences in personal style that they are likely to encounter. To be effective in the role, you have to be able to flex from your own preferred style to match that of the training group.

Dr Clare Howard is Managing Director of behavioural preferences assessment provider Academy28. An expert on personality preferences in learning, teamwork and communications, she has been a coach and consultant for 20 years. To find out how you to become more flexible in your training approach, find out more at http://www.academy28.com Academy 28 runs a regular public programme of Advanced Trainer Skills programmes. Also available in-house, and as a tailored training team development day.