

Training Professors to be Trainers and Vice-Versa

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Scene One: You are a college professor and a local company has contacted your continuing education department needing someone to do in-house training. You know the material, but have never trained in a business environment before.

Scene Two: You’ve been a trainer in business for several years, and you now have a chance to teach for a local college for the first time.

These scenes could easily play out as either comedies or tragedies instead of being successful learning experiences. While both academia and organizational training are in the business of increasing knowledge and skills of the learners, the approaches are often surprisingly divergent. In order for you as an academician to function in organizational training or for you as a trainer to do well as a college professor, you need to understand the environmental differences.

The table below offers a summary of nine major areas of difference.

Differences Between Academic Learning and Organizational Training

Factor	Academic Learning	Organizational Training
Trainer Credentials	Academic – often only academic. Some colleges, especially two-year & teaching schools, also consider work experience and other qualifications.	Skill or knowledge in relevant subject regardless of academic achievement. Skill in interpersonal communications is also important.
Course Content	Usually broad and theoretical. Certain technical fields may also have practical elements.	Focused and task oriented. Deals mostly with facts, measurable outcomes and procedures; only rarely with concepts.
Objective Levels	Usually knowledge-based and occasionally skill-based. Job performance objectives are often only peripheral issues.	Most concerned with job performance. Knowledge and skill-level objectives are means to an end.

Time Basis	Usually lock-step and tied to a semester or quarter system.	Typically short-term; more self-paced; new groups start as needed.
Grading System	"A" through "F."	Usually pass-fail. Many programs are not graded at all. Some are proficiency-based.
Common Presentation Style	Lecture and other inductive forms, although case studies and lab applications are becoming more common.	Often uses participative experiences, even in a classroom form. More deductive. Hands-on is most common for OJT.
Reason for Participation	To obtain a degree, certificate, or other credential. Some participate for self-satisfaction, but most for career and employment reasons.	Required by employer in order to support the organization's needs. Participation may be a condition of keeping a job or getting promoted.
Student Unit	Individual. Working together is considered cheating for many types of assignments. "Client" is the individual student.	Group learning is much more common, except in OJT. "Client" is the organization in which the trainee works.
Training Materials	Comprehensive textbooks, web-based resources & outside research materials.	Company materials & trainer-designed materials. Only rarely are books used.
<p>From Chapter 1 of Robert H. Vaughn, <i>The Professional Trainer: A Comprehensive Guide to Planning, Delivering and Evaluating Training Programs, 2nd Ed.</i> Berrett-Koehler © 2005. (www.bkconnection.com)</p>		

My career has been spent mostly in colleges, but my long-term involvement with ASTD has put me in constant contact with the business of training, and I've done training for more than 100 organizations. I find academics who are not successful in the training business usually have a strong tendency to lecture, to think they know more than they do, and a lack of flexibility.

If you're an academic preparing to do organizational training...

Pay special attention to the needs analysis phase as you design the program. (You probably never had to do this in a college.) Most business training is “no-frills.” Design your objectives to encompass just the skills and knowledge necessary to do the jobs the organization needs to have done. This will often be limited to factual and procedural information. Only include conceptual information which is necessary to enable the trainees to understand facts or procedures they need to learn. Hopefully, you can do a true needs analysis to identify the “knowledge or skills gap” so you’re not teaching things participants already know or coming in above or below their current levels of understanding. Never talk down to the trainees.

Learn the language of the organization. You will lose credibility if you only know the “textbook” terms instead of what things are called by the trainees. Spend time in the organizational environment before you begin to train. Talk with people who will be in your classes, as well as their supervisors, not just the staff person who hires you. Watch the soon-to-be trainees do their work, if you can. Learn what sort of products or information make up the inputs and outputs of their jobs. Know at least a little about the organization structure, the market and the product or services with which the trainees are dealing.

Minimize inductive training (i.e., lecture), and instead, opt for deductive training whenever possible. Use a variety of styles in your design to accommodate the kinesthetic (hands on) learners, the visual learners, and any auditory learners who happen to show up (they’re rare). Have the trainees create or do things in a manner as close as possible to what they do on their actual jobs. Make sure people understand the practical application of their learning.

Plan for easy transfer of training back to the workplace. To do this, create things such as checklists, templates or examples which they can take away from the training and use on the job. Work with the supervisors to find ways to encourage using new skills and knowledge such as contests, secret shoppers, and other

motivational techniques. When possible, train people in natural work groups so they can support each other, or at least try to schedule more than one person from each work unit. That way they're not alone when they get back to the job. Schedule the training as closely as possible in time to when new equipment, software, techniques, or whatever they're learning will actually be implemented.

If you're a trainer preparing to teach in college ...

I've hired dozens of adjunct faculty. The most common problems the newcomers faced fell into three groups: Grading, delivery of content, and dealing with students.

Trainers often aren't accustomed to actually providing grades, which means they must create tests and evaluate assignments. Neither of these tasks is a natural skill. Sometimes just getting new faculty to even give tests is difficult. Some want to only give a final, although it's much better to test at least four or five times during a term so both students and faculty get frequent feedback. In addition, there need to be other measures of student learning such as homework, projects, in-class exercises, and the like. The tests need to be valid (directly measure the learning objectives at the correct level), reliable (consistent across all student categories and across multiple administrations), and have effective discrimination (there is a small but distinct difference between correct and incorrect answers).

I find many trainers spend too much time drawing examples from their own company or industry. These are useful to a point, but students who lack experience or who work in other industries may not relate well. There's usually a textbook for support, and it's important to pace the material effectively. Covering the correct subject matter is important because subsequent courses or degree requirements may necessitate student mastery of certain information.

Trainers may be more reluctant than academics to hold students to appropriate standards. Some college students are so eager they constantly challenge the teacher, while others are so laid back they generate frustration. Unlike training in

a company, students don't have a common frame of reference or the motivation of keeping their jobs.

Be sure to find out what college supports are available. These include instructor's manuals, other materials from textbook publishers, test banks, any available internal professional development programs, and so on. Many colleges assign mentors to new instructors, and if that's possible, try to be matched with an experienced faculty who teaches the same subject and is willing to work with you.

A good new instructor orientation meeting should cover various items such as those listed in this article. Review the course syllabus with your dean or chair before the class begins, and keep in touch throughout the term to insure you stay on track.

All of us – academics and organizational trainers alike – are in the knowledge business to help people learn new ideas and skills making their jobs and lives easier. If we tune into the differences between the two environments, we can continue to make a positive difference for our students.

Bob Vaughn is an organizational training consultant, former dean of business and professor emeritus of management. He has been a 35 year member of ASTD with over 15 years on the board of the Greater Cleveland Chapter. Bob has authored several books including ASTD's 2010 **Trainer's Workshop: Decision Making Training**. He can be reached through www.ArvonManagement.com