

HOW TO COACH PARTNERS TO BE BETTER TRAINERS IN 4 EASY STEPS

BY MARSHA REDMON

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How well a partner engages and connects with his or her audience while presenting a CLE program has a big impact on the program's success. Now that many partners are offering CLE programs to clients and prospective clients, their "trainer" skills are even more crucial. This article provides four tips you can use immediately to coach partner "trainers" in your firm to become more engaging and effective.

USE INTERACTIVE TEACHING METHODS

Speakers who interact with their audiences and do more than lecture are always more effective and engaging. One simple way to interact is to ask questions of the audience and ask for a show of hands – "How many of you have clients doing business in California?" Asking "Are you with me, am I being clear?" is another good way to keep connected with the audience and ensure effectiveness.

A quick way to conduct an interactive exercise is to first demonstrate a skill or to role play with a volunteer before asking the audience to do the same exercise in small groups. Using a worksheet that walks participants through an exercise, with blanks for answers along the way, can speed things up and keep everyone on track. It is always wise to do a test run of a case study or role play with a few people similar to the real audience to ensure that directions are clear and that the scenario makes sense and to get a sense of timing.

CONNECT IN DYNAMIC WAYS WHEN TEACHING VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

While it's good to change one's method of teaching every 10 to 20 minutes when speaking

in person, I recommend varying the teaching method every 8 to 10 minutes during video-conference training to keep people engaged.

The good news is that there are many ways to interact with remote audiences. For example, one can: (1) ask the audience to answer questions or to share comments with the group; (2) interact with participants through discussion or exercise; (3) interact with a co-teacher or co-host in each location; or (4) interact with a handout, a prop, or other item in the participants' room.

Having a co-teacher or co-host in each (or some) remote location(s) will vary the focus and increase engagement. Co-teachers should teach some sections and sometimes run the exercises for the whole audience to take the focus off of the main location.

Using video clips to demonstrate best practices or illustrate an issue can add greatly to the engagement of the audience. Consider filming a subject matter expert, senior lawyer, or client and using the video clip every time the CLE is delivered. This is a great way to get consistent information into each session in an entertaining way without needing a special speaker to attend live. See www.marsha.com/blog for more detailed tips on presenting via video-conference.

SHOW ENTHUSIASM FOR THE TOPIC

Few things engage an audience faster than a speaker who loves his or her topic. The challenge with some lawyer

presenters is getting them to *show* their enthusiasm or interest.

To coach a partner to show more energy you might consider asking: "John, what's the most exciting example of this legal issue you've run into? What do few people know about or many misunderstand about this area?" The goal is to remind the partner how interesting the topic is and get him or her talking about that at the start of workshop. For truly low-energy presenters, showing them a video clip of themselves

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might make the point. You can say: “I know how interesting you find this area of law, but it’s not quite coming through when you’re speaking. Let’s find a story or case study to open with to demonstrate how relevant this topic is.”

BEGIN EACH WORKSHOP IN A DYNAMIC WAY

Stories or examples are often a great way to start. First, you might “interview” partners to uncover interesting stories about cases, deals, or clients that they can start with to humanize a topic and themselves while still ensuring relevance to this audience. Second, you might ask whether an experienced associate might relate a story at the start about his or her experiences

with the topic to engage the audience and highlight the practical value of the session.

Surveys can be another dynamic way to start a CLE program. Use a free survey tool to send associates (or clients) a three- to five-question survey to test their knowledge, uncover their interests, or both, as a starting point. Walking briefly through the results can engage everyone and give the partner trainer an easy way to start the session.

For recent survey results on how law firms are using videoconference training, based on Marsha’s 2010 Professional Development Institute workshop and survey, visit <http://marsha.com/2010/12/09/pdi-survey-results/>. ■

