

Handling Change in your Training Event

Running a Training Event brings change to how someone acts, reacts, thinks and goes about their daily tasks. If Training did not do this, training would be a worthless exercise. How you handle the change in your Training Event speaks volumes about you as a trainer. Understanding the impact that change can have on individuals is important to manage your training event successfully.

Training can be defined as

‘A process to modify Knowledge, Skill, Attitude or Ability through learning to achieve improved performance in an activity or range of activities developing the skills of the individual to satisfy the current and future needs of an organisation’

and Learning as

‘A relatively permanent change in behaviour that occurs as a result of practice or experience’

Training is done to people and learning is what the people do. How they handle change determines how ‘relatively permanent’ the change is. If you choose to ignore that change does occur in your training event then your training will not be visible beyond the training environment. However, if you are aware that change happens during training your training will be visible beyond your training environment. Managing change is a vital skill for any trainer on two counts.

1. We have to go through the change first. If there is a new process, policy, product or rebranding we have to understand why it is happening and how it will all work.
2. Managing the change in your training. Your understanding of it and explaining that you have gone through it will help your delegates understand how to deal with the change.

Granted, there are two types of change: - Change for change sake and Change for the better. Change for the better is 99% easier to deal with and to train than change for change sake. It is easier to explain, it is easier to sell to your delegates and if you manage it well the transition to the ‘new’ way will be faster and less traumatic. Change for change sake is fraught with issues from the start. There will be negativity from your delegates and possibly from you if you do not understand why it is changing. Handle this incorrectly and nothing will change in the workplace.

Change

To understand how to manage change we need to understand what is going on with our delegates.

First we need to understand the type of delegate that we will have on our Training Courses.

1. **The Avoider.** This type of delegate avoids taking part in discussions and exercises
2. **The Resister.** This person resists all attempts to change what do at present believing that what they do is right and if they change it will result in their job changing
3. **The Acceptor.** This person accepts all that you throw at them be it major change or a small change. Although they accept in the training they become a resister in the workplace.
4. **The Seeker.** They seek more information about the change and how it will affect them and why it is happening.

Your delegates may be one of these types of person or all of them at different stages of the training. Dealing with the changes in delegate perception is an important part of training as is recognising that you as a trainer will also be one of the types regarding change.

The process of change can be described using the Kubler-Ross Change curve. Dr Elisabeth Kubler-Ross was a Swiss born psychiatrist who helped people through the stages of grief after losing a loved one. Her change curve was published in her book 'On Death and Dying' (1969) which is cited as one of the most important humanitarian works on care of the dying. In it Kubler-Ross describes the stages that people go through when we lose a loved one, a major change in our lives and I am in no way suggesting that a change that happens in a Training Environment is anywhere near as traumatic as losing a loved one but, the process of dealing with and accepting the change is similar.

The Kubler-Ross Change Curve looks like this

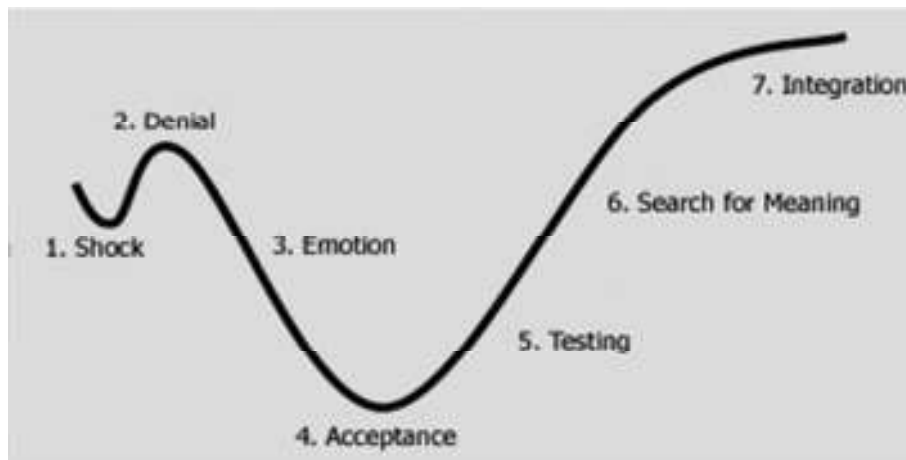


Figure 1 Kubler-Ross Change Curve

It has seven steps that need to be completed for the change to be complete. The first three steps are the reaction to the proposed change

1. Shock
2. Denial
3. Emotion

This is where you see the type of delegate come through (Avoider, Resister, Acceptor and Seeker) and where you have to manage change effectively to minimise the impact on the individuals. As trainers we live in the third area, Emotion. The Emotion area can be a prolonged period depending on the Training you are delivering. If you are running an accredited course (Chartered Management Institute (CMI), Chartered Institute of Personnel

Development (CIPD), etc.) then the Emotion area of the change curve can be protracted.



Figure 2 Where we operate as Trainers

The deeper the downward curve the more difficult it is to effect change. The Emotion and Acceptance stage can be a series of peaks and troughs until the change is tested. Managing these two areas during the change process is important to make the transition from one way of doing something to another.

In Training the aim is to make the Emotion to Acceptance slope as shallow as possible. We do this this making the learning environment comfortable and conducive to learning (see my blog entry at <http://aitraining.net/andysblog/?p=207> on this topic) and involving the learners quickly and if possible, when dealing with change in an organisation, dispel any rumours about why the change is happening.

Once we get our delegates to the acceptance stage and they then test what they have learnt, either in a role play, a simulation or an assessment, they can then search for how it will improve or affect what they do and that will assist with the new skills, knowledge, ability or attitude being transferred to the workplace.

Training is all about change, we are changing people's skills, knowledge, ability and hopefully attitudes so that they can progress in their chosen careers. To deny that training is about change is denying people's chances of development and advancement and as Trainers that is not what we are about.