

To Handout or not to Handout, that is the Question

By Andy Taylor

Providing Training can be a costly exercise for any organisation, especially when times are tough. The equipment and materials needed by a Trainer to deliver effective training vary considerably from course to course and subject to subject.

The more technical or the more legal information that is required dictates how many handouts are required. The question of handouts is a big one, hence the title of this article. The costs involved in producing handouts can get out of control. You have the cost of ink or toner to print them, the paper, the electricity and then the time it takes to print them and put them together or in order.

So what should a handout be?

A handout should be a useful document, a document or series of documents that enhance what you are talking about and provide a visual representation of it. They are particularly useful when you are describing a model that is to be used in Training, Interviewing or Management to show how areas are linked. They should form a handy source of reference for your delegates.

They are not a script of what you have said. If they are why are you there? They are not a means of shortening the training (unless you are running a distance learning event) so that you save more time and money. Do this and your training will suffer and the organisation will see no value in it as your delegates will not read all the material that you provide them.

Some documents you need to have a physical copy and must be a handout. Your evaluation forms need to be physical because that way they are easy to keep track of.

There is no need to provide a handout of the Training Objectives, do this and your delegates will use it as a check list to see what you have done and how long is left.

PowerPoint slides are another area where you do not need to provide a handout. Note taking is a skill and the Training environment is the ideal place to learn this. The other thing to note is, your PowerPoint slides are your work (especially if you are a consultant) so why are you giving them away for free? Plus PowerPoint slides should be points or phrases that you expand upon. If they form a handout on their own why are they not a handout instead of a slide?

When not to handout

With the availability of the internet on PCs, laptops, iPads and Smartphones you can easily provide a link either during the training or in an email after the training. This is especially useful if the information that you want to pass on is very big and would infringe copyright laws (currently you can reproduce 1% of a complete work for the purposes of training without infringing copyright law). Don't provide too many links though, you do the leg work and find the most relevant and useful.

Don't believe that the more handouts you have the better the training is perceived to be. Swamping your delegates in paper will not do you any favours or the rainforests. You also have to think how many handouts will be left behind. This can be disheartening after you spent the time producing them but, if they are still in good condition, not drawn on, no notes and not creased they can be used again.

The Training event that you are running will also dictate if you provide handout or not. A Training event about listening skills should not have handouts - it is about listening and if you provide handouts it defeats the object. A listening skills course or section of a course is an opportunity for delegates to practice their note taking skills.

The Rules of Handouts

There are rules when providing handouts.

Do

1. Make them relevant
2. Make them interesting - a picture speaks a thousand words
3. Include colour where you can (black and white printing is cheaper though)
4. Account for delegates with dyslexia. The font, the font size and the paper colour (pastel colours are better) all play a part in making it easier for people with dyslexia to read what you are providing.
5. Make them logical. Like training they should follow in a logical sequence so hand them out at the correct time, not all at once otherwise you will lose your delegates focus.

Don't

1. Make them too wordy if they are to be used in the Training Event. Delegates will read at different speeds and delegates with dyslexia may struggle to read them.
2. Overwhelm delegates with handouts. Use internet links where you can.
3. Over clutter handouts. Keep them clean (see point 1 above).
4. Rely on handouts. Like training they need updating regularly so be sure that the information you are providing is current and up to date.
5. Reuse handouts that have been left behind if they are drawn on, have notes on them or are creased and torn.

Above all use your judgement when it comes to handouts. Use them but, use them well in a way that is cost effective and adds value to your training rather than distracts from it.

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