

TrainingBriefs

Strengthen Sessions with Style

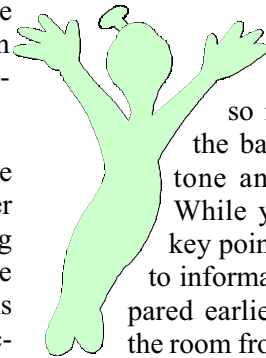
DECEMBER 1997

NUMBER 5

Member training and development are a shared responsibility between AmeriCorps program staff, site supervisors, training coordinators, and trainers. *TrainingBriefs* are designed to provide these individuals with useful information and innovative ideas for training and development.

A trainer's personal style makes a real difference in participant receptiveness to learning. Using interactive methods and tools to engage participants provides a base for effective training. Training style can add to — or detract from — the effectiveness of interactive training.

Look and be interesting. Project energy, movement, enthusiasm. Use relevant examples to explain issues and demonstrate skills. Walk around and use your hands.



Speak loudly enough so it is easy to hear from the back of the room. Vary tone and sentence structure. While you speak, summarize key points on newsprint. Point to information on newsprint prepared earlier and hanging around the room from the training's activities. Don't read; if notes are needed, use key words and phrases on newsprint (Check out "Hot Tips for Using Newsprint" in this *TrainingBrief*).

As you train, be aware of your own style and how participants react to it. Consider having participants from previous training sessions (such as last year's members) give you some feedback. Then modify actions that may negatively affect training effectiveness. The following behaviors typically enhance participant involvement in training sessions and increase training success.

Keep participants engaged when presenting information. Ask questions, and encourage different individuals to answer. Observe the group; if concepts don't "click," provide another example. If attention begins to wander, ask "yes/no" questions and have participants stand to give their answers, instead of raising their hands. Make eye contact with participants in various parts of the room. Keep participants alert by posing a content question when they least expect it, using a quick quiz, or (once the group knows each other well) asking a specific individual what s/he would do in a particular situation.

Project self-confidence — but not arrogance. Confidence and a sense of being prepared make participants feel a trainer has a lot to offer. On the other hand, few people are attracted by someone who thinks s/he "knows everything"; show that you are open to learning from participants as well as teaching them.

Show interest in the participants and their needs. During activities, listen to the participants and try to address their stated needs and concerns.

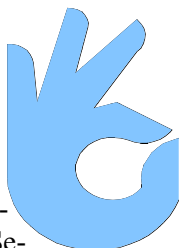
Reveal something about yourself. Participants are more likely to openly discuss their opinions or problems when the trainer shares experiences from her/his own life. Discuss difficulties as well as successes, so participants will understand that you have had to address similar challenges. This approach makes participants feel connected and comfortable with the trainer and also enhances credibility.

TrainingBriefs produced by MOSAICA, under Cooperative Agreement #CA95-15 with CNS. This *TrainingBrief* was written by MOSAICA President Emily Gantz McKay, and Training Specialist Dan Balón, and designed by LaTosha Joseph. This material represents the opinion of MOSAICA, and does not necessarily represent official CNS policy.

To begin or stop receiving MOSAICA's *TrainingBriefs* by fax, or find out about training and other available assistance, contact: Diane Cabrales, Project Director, MOSAICA, 1000 16th Street, N.W., Suite 604, Washington, DC, 20036, e-mail mosaica@ix.netcom.com, website <http://www.mosaica.org>, telephone (202) 887-0620, fax (202) 887-0812.

MOSAICA Adds New Staff Member

Dan Balón joins the MOSAICA team as Training Specialist. He will assist with AmeriCorps training sessions, technical assistance, and these lovely *TrainingBriefs*. He recently moved to the Washington, D.C. area from Seattle. Welcome Dan!



comfortable participants feel with the trainer and setting (e.g., discussing certain topics, speaking in a large group, making eye contact, participating in activities that involve physically touching other people). Whenever uncertain about cultural factors, always ask individuals privately.

Need Help?

MOSAICA provides telephone technical assistance free of charge to all CNS-funded programs on their training concerns. Call Diane Cabrales or Dan Balón at (888) 409-2600.



A Useful Resource

MOSAICA developed *Starting Strong: A Guide to Pre-Service Training* to help AmeriCorps programs plan and deliver effective training. Request a copy from the National Service Resource Center at ETR. Contact Jennifer Ryan by e-mail at jennifer@etr-associates.org or fax at (408) 438-3618.

Activity: The Small Group Brainstorm

Trainer style can enhance any activity, as illustrated in this small-group brainstorm.

Purposes:

To allow members to see the effectiveness of brainstorming and its value in problem solving. To help members apply problem-solving ideas to a practical situation they must address.

Instructions:

Suppose your in-service session will focus on building community resources by developing “resource centers” within community-based organizations, beginning with a children’s library, since there is no public library in the neighborhood. Before the training, create one or more *scenarios* — written situations that relate directly to the in-service topic and to member service assignments. For example, a scenario might focus on ways to maximize resident participation in an upcoming neighborhood book collection event. At the session, divide members into cooperative learning teams of 4-6 people and assign each team a different scenario. Have members assume cooperative learning roles (facilitator, recorder, reporter, timekeeper, observer) — for more information, see *Starting Strong*, pp. 197-202.

During brainstorming, the goal is to gather as many ideas as possible. Tell members not to discuss or criticize — no matter what opinions they have of certain solutions, it most important first to collect ideas (quantity) rather than critique them (quality). Give each team 5-10 minutes to brainstorm solutions to their own scenarios. Each team’s recorder should write all ideas on newsprint, without comment.

If you are concerned about whether the members feel comfortable with brainstorming or if members do not yet know each

other well, trainer style can facilitate the process. For example, include in your instructions encouragement for unexpected solutions — like “use a hot air balloon for attention the week before.” This helps members feel free to be creative, and may also make them more comfortable offering their suggestions — since few of them will be more unlikely than yours!

After brainstorming, members remain in their teams and begin grouping, evaluating, and prioritizing the ideas. They should begin by requesting any needed clarifications from the person making the suggestion. Give the teams 15-20 minutes to discuss the listed solutions and come to consensus on the solutions they would like to implement. In the large group, have the reporter of each team share their scenario and their “best” solutions. Members of the large group may ask any questions, provide comments, or add alternative solutions. Use your style to make reporters comfortable, praise the work of the teams, and share some practical experiences you have had that illustrate the value of their work. Ask a few questions to the full group to help ensure that they are paying attention to the reports of teams other than their own.

Lead a follow-up discussion about the brainstorming process. Ask groups to comment on how it felt not to talk about each suggestion as it came up. An important point of this activity is that group brainstorming yields more solutions than completing this activity alone. Encourage members who were not reporters to talk about the brainstorming and prioritizing process. If you know one team had difficulties, give an example of a time when you were part of a group that had difficulty with the “process” but ended up with a strong product. Communicate through your tone, attention, and enthusiasm that this was an important activity.

Hot Tips for Using Newsprint

- Record ideas on newsprint using easy-to-read dark and bold colored markers
- *Plan ahead with pre-made sheets to summarize points*
- Use newsprint to summarize directions for activities
- *Use different colors for headings, text, lines, and symbols*
- Alternate between two different colors when recording brainstorming ideas
- *Highlight key text with light or transparent markers*
- Point to information written on visuals
- *Tape newsprint ideas to the walls and keep posted*
- Have masking tape in ready-to-use strips for postin each sheet as you complete it
- *Use two newsprint pads and stands whenever possible*
- Have one facilitator record and another facilitate, when possible