CHAPTER 8 ULTIMATE CLOSING AND EVALUATION

INTRODUCTION

The closing of the training session probably garners the least attention of any component of the training process. Closing activities are routinely minimized or eliminated in the interest of time; instructors hustle to finish the session, and participants streak out of the room!

Brief, well-structured closing activities can have a powerful impact on the participants as they complete the training experience and again when they return to their respective agencies. Closing activities provide closure to instruction, tie up loose ends, summarize the highlights of training, challenge participants to practically apply what they have learned, suggest appropriate follow-up, and make transitions.

Evaluation of the training experience is unfortunately often viewed as a "bothersome" task that takes place at the end of a session. Evaluation of the trainer, learning, and environment is most often a "have-to," rushed task dreaded by participants and trainers alike! Evaluation, like other closing activities, is a valuable component to the training session for both the participant and trainer.

Ultimate educators use closing and evaluation activities to enhance or summarize learning, measure results, improve performance for trainers and participants, and aid in the transfer of learning to the workplace and personal life. The following sections explore topics of closing sessions and workshops and evaluation.

ENDING AN INDIVIDUAL SESSION

The critical components of ending individual sessions are reviewing and summarizing. Klatt (1999) lists seven steps for ending a session:

1. Acknowledge the existence of any "loose ends" or unfinished business. Tell the group when and how "loose ends" will be addressed.
2. Discuss the "whereas" and the "therefore." The "whereas" looks back and is a brief summary of what has occurred thus far. The "therefore" looks forward and involves planning how, when, and under what circumstances new learning will be used.
3. Provide a brief overview of what is coming in the next session and suggest "why" the group will find this valuable.
4. Review assignments for the next session (if any).
5. Recognize the group's efforts and successes thus far.

6. Gather formal or informal feedback.
7. Based on participant feedback, contract with the group for adjustments in workshop outcomes, process, content, or style.

Here are a few "session ending" activities that can assist you in effectively ending individual workshop sessions:

- *"Stringy" ball review*. A stringy-type, soft rubber ball can be found in most toy stores. During this activity, the trainer asks participants to state something they learned in the session. The trainer tosses out the ball to a participant; the participant responds to the question and then tosses the ball to another person. The trainer summarizes the feedback and makes closing statements.
- *Index card review*. At the end of a session, pass out 3 x 5 index cards. Ask participants to respond to specific questions concerning session content and/or training process. Three to five minutes at the end of the session are usually sufficient for this activity. Collect the cards and use the information to plan for the next session.
- *Klatt's (1999) One Minute Feedback and End of Session Feedback forms*. Print questions on 3 x 5 cards for use as session evaluations.

FEEDBACK FORMS

ONE MINUTE FEEDBACK

So far, I am finding this workshop to be (circle your response) . . .

Interesting	1	2	3	4	5	Uninteresting
Too fast	1	2	3	4	5	Too slow
Too easy	1	2	3	4	5	Too difficult
Relevant	1	2	3	4	5	Irrelevant
Organized	1	2	3	4	5	Disorganized
Relaxed	1	2	3	4	5	Tense

Please provide a brief comment for improving this workshop:

END OF SESSION FEEDBACK

I was most energized today when . . .

I was least interested today when . . .

Suggestions for improving this workshop . . .

ENDING THE WORKSHOP

One of the most difficult segments of an effective training workshop is bringing effective closure. It is a time to recap the highlights of what happened, reinforce learning, and encourage the participants to take action. The end of a workshop needs to not only bring a necessary sense of completion but also signal the commencement of a time when participants will begin to apply the learnings to real life.

This valuable component is frequently glossed over due to lack of time; yet participants need time to reflect on what they have learned, celebrate each other (the group can become a support system), and plan how they will turn the learning into action.

Pike (1989) states that closing allows for affirmation and celebration, allows action planning, and ties things together.

CLOSURE

Closure activities fall into seven categories:

1. *Looking back and planning ahead*: Probably the most traditional closing activities, these summarize the content, review expectations, and provide an opportunity for action planning.
2. *Sharing positive feedback*: Participants focus on each other and provide feedback.
3. *Fabulous prizes*: Fun ways to celebrate the participants.
4. *Coming home*: Preparation for re-entry back at the home-front.
5. *Staying in touch*: Mechanisms to help participants stay in contact after the session.
6. *Saying goodbye*: Methods to say goodbye nonverbally or via closing ceremonies.
7. *Following up*: Activities to provide participants with additional ideas and reinforce what was learned in the session.

Looking back and planning ahead. The most common method is a verbal review by the instructor during which expectations, objectives, and process are summarized. If this method is used, it is critical for the instructor to "revisit" opening participant expectations and session objectives, and clearly identify what was or was not accomplished during the training program.

A simple tear-sheet exercise can quickly summarize the workshop. Put up two tear-sheets with the headings "What's hot?" and "What's not?" Ask participants to think about the overall workshop (including expectations, objectives, environment, trainer, and participants) and respond to the questions verbally. This exercise provides a quick review of the session although it does not look ahead.

Other exercises:

- *Letter to the boss*. Pass out paper and envelopes. Ask participants to compose a letter to their boss. Include in the letter the most important skills, concepts, or issues they have learned; specific behavior or skills they plan to implement upon returning to work; additional training they feel they need to do their job better; and an expression of appreciation for time off to attend the workshop. Ask volunteers to share highlights of their letters. Variation: write to spouse, friend, parent, or child.
- *Personal learning goals*. This exercise can be used if participants were asked to identify personal learning goals at the beginning of the workshop or prior to coming. At the end of the workshop, arrange the participants in a circle and ask them to tell the group what their goals were; how successful they were in reaching their goals (on a scale of one to five); reasons they did or did not reach their goals; and whether or not they were satisfied with the goals they set for themselves and why (or why not).
- *I learned and I plan to . . .* Prepare a card or handout with the following unfinished statements: "I learned that I . . ."; "I re-learned that I . . ."; "I discovered that I . . ."; "I noticed that I . . ."; "I was surprised that I . . ."; "I am disappointed that I . . ."; and "I plan to . . ." Ask participants to complete these statements. Ask some of them to share their statements; if there are more than 20 participants, this activity could be completed in small groups.

Sharing positive feedback. Allow participants an opportunity to share positive feedback about each other and the instructor. Tossing around the soft/stringy ball is one method to accomplish this important task; here are some others:

- *Full plate*. Pass paper plates out to participants along with a strip of masking tape. Ask each participant to take a pencil or pen. Have participants assist each other in attaching the paper plates to each other's backs. People circulate and write positive affirmations, observations, or feedback about each person on his or her plate.
- *Brown bagging it*. Sometime during the workshop, give participants a small paper lunch bag. Have participants personalize their bag. Ask participants to write notes to each other and place them in the bags. Participants cannot read the contents of their bags until they are going home or are at home. Variation: use paper cups.

Fabulous prizes. Fabulous prizes are a fun method to energize, reward, and celebrate participants. Throughout the workshop and especially at closing, cheap fun prizes can be "awarded" to participants for accomplishments, witty sayings, winning contests, etc. Prizes at the closing of a session can be used to honor exceptional contributions to the training experience.

Coming home. When people have been away from their respective agencies for two or more days, they might need assistance in re-entry. You may want to spend a few moments talking about how they are going to share what they have learned with colleagues and friends back home.

Staying in touch. When participants leave a training experience, it is often to return to a "business as usual" routine. Staying-in-touch activities remind them of the training experience and can serve to re-energize and motivate. Here are a couple of examples:

- *Name exchange*. Prepare copies of an information sheet with headings for name, address, e-mail, and phone and fax numbers. Include space for three additional statements: "Remember me as/for . . ." (participants write down what they would like to be remembered for); "I need . . ." (write down some resource or area that needs resolving); and, "I can give . . ." (remind other participants of resources you can provide).
- *Paper airplanes*. The instructor discusses the importance of staying in touch. Pass out colored construction paper to participants; ask them to write their name, address, and phone number in the center of the paper; participants build paper airplanes under the guidance of a volunteer instructor; when finished, they simultaneously toss the planes in the air. Participants pick up an airplane and are instructed to telephone, e-mail, or write the person named on their plane within ninety days, discussing how they have incorporated ideas/skills learned in the training at their workplace.

Saying goodbye. Even if not in a formal way, make sure participants have sufficient time to say their good-byes to the instructor and fellow participants. It is helpful if, following a training session, the instructor(s) open the exit doors and stand there as participants leave, shaking their hands and offering words of both thanks and encouragement.

Following up. Following up activities reinforce what was learned in the workshop and renew determination to reach set goals. Formal follow-up surveys are discussed in the following evaluation section. Here is a sample exercise:

- *Letter or postcard to self*. Have participants address an envelope or postcard to themselves; ask them to write about the changes they want to make as a result of what they have learned. They should also include their most important goal. Have them put the letter in the envelope and seal it. The instructor collects the letters and mails them to participants 30 days after the program ends.

EVALUATION

Evaluation tools are used to measure current results and to improve future results. While formal written instruments are often viewed by instructors and participants alike as a nuisance, if properly developed and implemented, they can be invaluable.

Training expert Robert W. Pike (1989) writes that evaluation is *not*:

- *Data for data's sake*. Do not collect information just to have it.
- *Punitive*. Evaluation is done to measure and improve the effectiveness of training, not to reward those who achieve and punish those who do not.
- *Egocentric*. Evaluation is not done to massage anyone's ego.
- *Smile sheets*. Whether or not people liked the program is a very small part of evaluation.
- *One time*. Trainers must continually measure the effectiveness of what they do.
- *Complex*. Effective evaluation does not have to be complex.
- *The realm of scientists and statisticians*. Evaluation is meant to be a tool to improve results over time, not a full employment strategy for those with a Ph.D. in math or statistics.

Additionally, Pike states that besides being a process that helps measure the effectiveness of training, evaluation should be a number of other things as well:

- *Exciting*. It helps you see in a concrete way that what you are doing is making a difference.
- *Rewarding*. It allows participants and other stakeholders to see that the training they have attended has made a positive difference to themselves and the workplace.
- *On-going*. The environment that trainers work in is ever shifting and changing. Evaluation is an ongoing way to insure that the training being delivered is in touch with current needs and reality.
- *A way of assigning accountability for the learning*. If evaluations measure not only what participants have learned and the skills they can demonstrate, but also the environment within which they apply these things on the job and the support systems that enable them to use the training, then trainers have total accountability for learning and application.
- *A change tool*. Training is one method of helping people retool to meet changing challenges and opportunities.
- *Part of the organization's "Early Warning System."* It develops awareness of shifts that can affect the organization.

Sandra Merwin (1992) provides the following definition of evaluation:

> Evaluation is the means used to determine the worth or value of the training.

Effective evaluations can reveal:

- If learning took place.
- Participants' entry level.
- If the training objectives were met.

- If the facilities met participants' needs.
- If the facilities met the instructor's needs.
- If the trainer fulfilled his or her job requirements.
- How participants plan to use information.
- Training effectiveness.
- Areas that need improvement in the training.
- Future training needs for participants.

There are several methods you can use to measure your training impact including pre- and post-tests, participant/trainer evaluations, self-evaluations, work statements, and follow-up evaluations. In Appendix C, *Sample Evaluation Forms*, are examples of the following types of evaluations that you may wish to use in your training sessions.

- *Post-workshop evaluation*. At the end of a training session, participants are thinking about "getting on the road" and heading home. Because most participants are thinking about leaving the session on time, it is important to have a well-prepared post-workshop evaluation. From the instructor's perspective, the evaluation needs to provide the data necessary to improve future training. A successful post-workshop evaluation form needs to satisfy both the participant and trainer by being brief and able to be completed quickly as well as gathering many types of information (Merwin 1992). (See Appendix C.1, *Sample Participant Evaluation Form*.)

- *Post-workshop instructor evaluation*. The evaluation by the session leader asks the trainer to assess workshop elements: the participants, the trainer, the content, and the environment. A complete evaluation system would include trainer assessments in the evaluation package. (See Appendix C.2, *Sample Evaluation by Trainer*.)

- *Follow-up survey*. Follow-up surveys given to participants several months after the workshop provide information on what was valuable for on-the-job application, what did/did not work when participants applied learning, and what they suggest for future training sessions. (See Appendices C.3, *Follow-up Evaluation* and C.4, *Training Follow-up Survey* for two samples.)

For longer sessions (one day or more), it is helpful to include written instructions with the participant evaluations of logistics and sessions. A sample evaluation package is included in Appendix C.5, *Participant Evaluation*.

Regardless of the type of evaluation used, it is helpful to offer "incentives" to participants for turning in evaluation forms, which are often ignored or lost. A simple technique is to have a "double roll" of raffle tickets; when evaluation are turned in, the participant receives a ticket. After the session (or the next morning, for multi-day sessions), the presenter draws from the raffle tickets for a "fabulous prize" to the winner. This technique has been known to result in 100 percent participation in daily evaluations!

Additionally, in training programs that involve more than one instructor/facilitator, it is helpful to conduct a brief evaluation of the session from the leaders' perspective. The "alpha-delta" faculty debriefing process is highlighted in Chapter 2.

ULTIMATE EDUCATORS CLOSE WORKSHOPS WITH STYLE AND CLASS AND GATHER THE INFORMATION NECESSARY TO PROVIDE EVEN BETTER TRAINING IN THE FUTURE!

This chapter discussed the importance of effective closing of both individual sessions and the entire workshop. Effective closing activities and formal evaluations provide ultimate educators with the data to improve performance in the future. How will you close your next session? Be creative, make it memorable!

Klatt, B. 1999. *The Ultimate Training Workshop Handbook*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Merwin, S. 1992. *Evaluation: 10 Significant Ways for Measuring & Improving Training Impact*. MN: Resources for Organizations Incorporated.

Pike, R. W. 1989. *Creative Training Techniques Workbook*. MN: Resources for Organizations. In S. Merwin, *Evaluation: 10 Significant Ways for Measuring & Improving Training Impact*, MN: Resources for Organizations Incorporated, 1992.