

Research-Based Selection and Training of Trainers

Everyone agrees that some trainers have a stronger positive impact on participants' learning than others do. But how do you select and develop exemplary trainers? Fortunately, researchers have found three keys to trainer effectiveness. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the original hypothesis, review the research data, and suggest some applications.

THE HYPOTHESIS

Three Facilitative Qualities. In 1949, Carl R. Rogers, Ph.D., proposed the hypothesis that three "facilitative qualities" in teachers spur growth in learners. Refined slightly during four decades of research, the basic idea remains: when teachers exhibit empathy, respect, and genuineness, they positively impact their students' learning and do so in measurable ways. These qualities help explain what makes certain trainers outstanding.

Empathy is a sensitivity to how the participant feels about what is happening in the learning situation. Trainers demonstrate this understanding through listening to participants' questions, comments, and resistance. Being empathic also involves tailoring each presentation, demonstration, and activity to the participants' frame of reference.

Trainers model **respect** by developing a relationship with each participant, by actively tapping group and individual wisdom, and by reacting nondefensively to criticism of the course or the trainers.

Genuineness reflects a trainer's willingness to be a real person when relating to participants. It means avoiding the roles of "teacher," "expert," or "defender of the teachings." As Rogers put it, the genuine trainer is "*being*, not denying himself or herself. The trainer is present to the students."

THE RESEARCH

In an extensive series of studies, Dr. David Aspy and his colleagues evaluated the effect of the three facilitative qualities on learning. They developed rating scales used by unbiased raters to measure the levels of empathy, respect, and genuineness exhibited by a teacher. Dr. Aspy's group recorded and assessed more than 3,500 hours of instruction from 550 teachers in various grades of elementary and secondary school. The researchers then correlated the teacher ratings with students' achievement test scores and a number of other variables.

The results of this massive, well-designed research indicate that students make the greatest gains in learning when their teachers have high levels of empathy, respect, and genuineness. There were measurable gains in such diverse areas

as reading achievement, grade point average, cognitive growth, creative interest and productivity, and self-confidence. The location of the school, the race of the teacher or the racial make-up of the class did not influence these gains.

In *Helping and Human Relations*, Vol. II Dr. Robert Carkhuff cites numerous other studies that confirm the positive impact of empathy, respect, and genuineness on learning. Additionally, evidence from our own organization supports these conclusions.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ACTION

Based on this research, we've found three ways to improve trainer effectiveness.

Design of Trainer Development

Workshops. With the right kind of training, workshop leaders can increase their levels of empathy, respect, and genuineness. Unfortunately, many training programs actually decrease the facilitative skill levels in the people being trained. As one researcher concluded, trainer development programs may be "for better or for worse."

Significant amounts of time need to be devoted directly to the further development of the key facilitative qualities. Trainer development workshops need to encourage the participants to express the facilitative qualities in all they do—in making presentations, asking questions,

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working with resistance, and so forth. Teaching methods too must support the development of these qualities.

Trainer Selection. The research reveals a rule of selection that contradicts the “anyone-can-do-it” syndrome so prevalent in the training field. In that popular mindset, with little or no training any successful salesperson or manager can be an effective trainer, despite the fact that he or she might be lacking in the facilitative qualities.

Many in the training field believe strongly in the growth potential of each individual—and we share that belief. However, development can be slow and costly if trainer candidates do not possess a high competence or natural potential to begin with. Twenty-three centuries ago, Hippocrates, the founder of modern medicine, advised his colleagues, “Select the naturals.” In training, that advice holds true: select those people with high levels of the facilitative qualities.

The Trainer of Trainers. Even if the workshop is perfectly designed, and trainer candidates possess these qualities, the results may still be neutral, or even negative. Research shows that the facilitative qualities of trainees can develop only to the level demonstrated by the leaders conducting the training.

The conclusion is obvious: only people who exemplify genuineness, respect, and empathy should lead trainer development workshops. The impact of these leaders through the trainers they have trained is felt, like a ripple effect, by participants in every workshop.

CONCLUSION

In an era where competitive advantage is often linked to skilled and knowledgeable employees, the importance of trainer selection and training has been overlooked. By including these three core qualities in trainer development, and in screening training firms, you can increase the proficiency of learners during the learning event, a prerequisite to using that knowledge on the job.

For more information about Ridge’s approach to trainer development, review the course description for *The Craft of Training*® at www.ridge.com. Or use the “Contact us” web form to request to speak with someone regarding your specific trainer development needs.

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