

## BACK TO BASICS?

BY KEVIN LOHAN

**O**n an email chat thing I subscribe to there was a recent flurry of chatter about boring training and how important it is to be entertrainers.

That is right. They said 'entertrainers'.

Are we seriously still having this debate? I thought the 90s were over.

You know, mostly I like to sit on the fence about things and not cause too many ruffles but this time I am going to jump off the fence and speak my mind.

Nobody likes to be stuck in a boring training session and I was recently asked to redesign a 3-day program that was nothing but PowerPoint slides - all with the same deep blue template and all of them filled with lots of words. Lots of words. Lots of slides.

But the program was not designed by an educator. It was put together by some poor schmuck who had to give up time from their real job and try to do the best they could as quickly as they could and the only model they had to work from was probably their own boring experiences and a copy of MS PowerPoint on their desktop.

Not to say that is OK of course and the organisation recognised the problem and wanted to do better. Good on them.

It was a highly technical course and no other organisation I can quickly think of would want this program. It needed to be designed from the beginning and it needed to be good.

In short and to put it simply, it needed to 'teach' people how to do their new job.

It ended up being four days but that was OK.

The important thing I want to stress is that I did not feel the need at any time in the four days to add some 'entertrainment'. There were no icebreakers, energisers, or 'parking lots' where questions were parked for later.

It was simply good, solid, practical learning. That is what people want. That is the side of the fence I am jumping to.

For pity's sake, I do not want to participate in some silly inane energiser any more than I want to sit through 45 PowerPoint slides in 30 minutes. I would prefer to be engaged in learning that is a good use of my time. I do not have to have fun. If there is something I need to learn then let's get on with it.

So, assuming that there are a lot of people like me, that is how I look at instructional design.

In the program I began this column with I simply started from the beginning. What do they need to do in their job? (Outcomes). Then, how can I 'simulate' that in a learning environment? (Methodology).

The rest was easy really. There were case studies, reading assignments (short ones), role plays (in which the learners just acted as themselves in a work setting and definitely NOT ones in which they had to be some made-up character) and problems to solve.

Really, it was all just like a day in their job - except without the reality of the

circumstances they will confront.

They loved it. They were not 'entertrained' at any time. They were treated as adults with a need. Their time was respected and the learning activities were self-evidently helpful.

So, I do not understand why we are still discussing how to be entertrainers.

I do, however, have a spark of an idea as to why that might be the case.

Is it perhaps that we still don't know how to design an engaging, practical program?

If you need an energiser to put some spark back into the group for example, what does that really tell you about the previous hour and a half of your instructional design?

So, let's get back to the basics of instructional design and stop bleating about being entertrainers. Start from the beginning and build a program that is based on what learners need to 'DO' with what you are helping them to learn.

**Kevin Lohan** is the principal of Endeavour Training and Development. Contact via [endeavour.net.au](mailto:endeavour.net.au)