

THE TRUTH ABOUT BALLOONS

BY KEVIN LOHAN

Like me, you've probably spent a lot of time and money on your own personal and professional development. It would be interesting to add up really. The investment of time and money in books, membership of professional bodies like the AITD, training programs, networking events and conferences with all of the add-on costs that are involved.

We invest a lot in what we do don't we? Often we do it because we love what we do and most of that investment seems worthwhile.

It's all about helping us to do better, to be better and even to feel better about our craft.

I've learned how to use the technology available to me in a learning environment. I've learned how to prepare well, including creating a good structure for the learning.

I've learned how to walk, to talk, to stand, to sit, how to use colour, how to not use colour, how to draw, to write, how to use butcher's paper and how to not use butcher's paper.

I've had others try to teach me how to apply magic in training, how to use relaxation techniques, what to put on the tables and how to mix groups up so that we create excellent group dynamics.

I've learned to adapt my delivery to different learning styles and different communication modalities.

It can be fun too. I went through a phase of 'creative training' in the

90's. (Oh, you did too?) I thought that I needed to add more creativity to what I was doing so that learners would be more engaged and (I'm going to say it), entertained.

As wonderful as all of this is though, I can't help thinking, how easy it might be, when we are so focused on what it is we have to do, that we begin to think that we are the show.

You know what I mean? We start to believe that for learners to learn it is all up to how well we plan and talk and stand and walk and write and draw and so on.

We think we are the star of the show. If 'training' was a movie, we might think of ourselves as the actors on screen. All that talent being used to entertain the crowd (and in some movies even try to teach us something).

But we're not the show. I'm sorry if that comes as something of a shock. No. We are not the show. We are more like the director of the movie, behind the scenes and kind of invisible.

Our job, like a movie director, is to put all of the pieces together so that the actors can do their thing.

In our world though, the real stars of the show are the learners. They're the ones on screen, not us.

Sometimes, and it can be a hard lesson, we actually get in the way of learning.

One of the most successful programs I ever ran did little more than put a whole

bunch of resources about the subject matter at the disposal of the learners, helped them understand where their areas of weakness were, pointed them at the resources and then, got out of the way and let them learn. There were four facilitators and twelve learners in a 5-day program. We were available to help design 'learning contracts' and to help re-focus if a particular resource was not helping. However, we did very little else.

It was labour intensive and therefore difficult to get support for but even now, 25 years later, I remain convinced that it was the best work I have ever done and most of the time, the four facilitators did very little at all. We were behind the scenes.

So, what that taught me is that we must learn to get out of the way more often. What we do is not all that important. What the learner does is the key. Help them do that and I believe you are a great facilitator and it doesn't matter a toss how you stand, how you walk, stand, sit, draw or write.

And remember how I once used to say it would be a good idea to have balloons in the training room? Well, erm, save them for birthday parties eh?

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