How to Choose Your Training Style

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I’m often asked, “What is the best style for a trainer to have?” I always respond with, “It depends.” It’s not that I’m trying to avoid answering the question; it really does depend. A number of factors go into deciding which **instructional style** to adopt. Choosing the most appropriate style will enhance the learning experience for your participants.

There is a continuum of instructional styles. On the far left we have the traditional training style where the focus is on the instructor and the training session is very much content-driven. In this style we say that the learning is dependent upon the instructor. On the opposite end of the continuum is a **facilitative style** of instruction that is focused on the learner. This style is process-driven and the learning takes place independently, without the instructor. Instead of the instructor delivering content in a traditional manner, the instructor is a “guide on the side.” In the center of the continuum is a **collaborative style** where the instructor and learners work together to achieve the learning objectives.

Given that these styles are on a continuum, there are different degrees of traditional, facilitative, and collaborative styles. To decide which style is most appropriate, we must take into account a number of factors, the first being the learners. Think about their level of experience, their motivation, and their previous learning experiences. If I have an inexperienced, unmotivated group of learners who have had no previous exposure to a facilitative style of learning, then I would probably start off in a more traditional style of instruction. On the other hand, if I have an experienced, motivated group that has been exposed to a facilitative style, I would certainly consider starting off with a facilitative style. If I don’t have previous knowledge of the group, I would probably start off in a collaborative style and, as I got to know the group, I would move to a more traditional or facilitative style, if needed.

Other factors to consider include the training time available, the type of content, and your own skill level as an instructor. If you are nearing the end of a session and running out of time, move to a traditional dependent style. If you are teaching leadership skills, consider a facilitative style; however, consider a more traditional style when teaching complex technical skills.

Also consider your own skill level as an instructor. If you have been a traditional-style trainer, look for opportunities in your training to gradually introduce facilitative-style techniques to increase your comfort level. A skilled instructor is able to move back and forth across the training style continuum based on these factors.

Tell us, what’s your style?

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