



A Rose by Any Other Name

Shakespeare had Juliet say in **Romeo and Juliet**, "What's in a name. That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet". Or would it?

I believe Shakespeare was pointing out that it is not the name but the nature of the object that really matters. What counts is what it is not what we call it. So does the label we use to describe our activities really matter? Are the labels "training", "presenting", "facilitating" meaningfully different or are they just alternative terms for "communicating". Do they communicate any clear and specific meanings to anybody. Well, I think the answer is no and yes. That is "no" they are not necessarily clearly and specifically different activities and "yes" they can and perhaps should be quite clearly and specifically different activities. The key word here is "activity" for, as Mark Twain once remarked, "Actions speak louder than words but not nearly as often", so the establishment of difference between these terms happens with their practice and application rather than just in the use of the label.

That is, there is no point in taking a straight presentation and calling it training or facilitation unless you change the nature of the process. The name change by itself does nothing. Such label manipulation is often used to market a presentation to an audience by changing their perception of what to expect. But if we disappoint them by just serving up a presentation labelled as training they will be suspicious of future offerings. Let's face it, we have all seen this happen much too often. So what are the changes we need to make to the process so we meet audience expectations and make best use of the different labels?

What are the expectations raised by each of the labels?

We can look at the expectations in three useful categories:

- Subject matter expertise
- Process expertise
- Focus of attention

Presenting

Audiences expect the "presenter" to have high subject matter expertise but not necessarily high process expertise. That is they expect to get good reliable information in a fairly straight-forward lecture format with some decent basic visual aids and some limited opportunity for interaction with the presenter, probably via a question and answer session. Of course a presenter can quite easily exceed this expectation by being more

interactive, conversational, lively or entertaining to grab attention and ensure thorough communication through shared meaning and/or the audience enjoys themselves. This is not, however, an expectation, it is a bonus. Effective communication of information is all that is really expected of a Presentation. No specific take-away learning is necessary beyond awareness that certain information exists. No behavioural/performance change is required for the presentation to be judged a success.

The audience tends to be quite passive in this process and therefore the time-scale of a presentation is ideally less than 20 minutes because this is the outer limit of the audience's ability to use the one skill required of them, listening.

The presenter and their information is the focus of attention

Training

The trainer is also expected to have some subject-matter-expertise but not necessarily as much as is usually expected of a straight presenter. The best trainers are often those who have quite recently been learners themselves, because they can easily connect with those still on the learning curve. So the trainer may not be a subject matter expert but will know more than the learners and have some process expertise. That is, the trainer is able to create a process of exploration and discovery for the learners that enables them to acquire for themselves the knowledge, attitudes and skills they need to be successful.

So the outcome here is beyond just communication through sharing and meaning. It is beyond simple awareness of the existence of information. The training must enable participants to change their behaviour during and after the training so that they can successfully become more productive. This is a complex process of paying attention, gaining understanding, adapting attitudes, acquiring skills and remembering so that the learning can be reproduced later.

The trainer might do some presenting but must add behaviours and processes that enable learners to actively explore, reflect, challenge, make mistakes, share ideas, transform information into knowledge, acquire skills and develop constructive attitudes. The learners must have opportunities to "digest" the learning and the trainer must create opportunities for the learners to practise and demonstrate the necessary behavioural changes. Everyone involved must have physical evidence that learning has occurred.

Training will obviously, therefore, tend to take substantially longer than presenting. Due to the limitations of general attention spans and energy levels it is usually best done in sessions of 90 minutes maximum.

The trainer and their information will periodically be the focus of attention with regular shift of attention to the learners, their information and behaviours.

Facilitation

As implied by its' derivation from the French "facile: to make easy", the facilitator is expected to be a process expert by not a subject matter expert. Indeed being a subject expert usually means having very definite views on a subject, which can be a hindrance to effectively facilitating other people's discussion, problem-solving and/or decision-making around the subject. Strictly speaking, the facilitator should impartially run the process without any display of their own views or knowledge.

It can be argued that great facilitators need to know enough to ask the right questions and should not know enough to judge the right answers.

One of the few exceptions to this is the facilitation of learning. The learning facilitator is expected to have more subject matter knowledge than the audience. For years we have had graduates of the Creative Training Techniques Seminar suggest that it would be more appropriately labelled Creative Facilitation Skills. We have always resisted this because of our commitment to expanding perceptions of training to "facilitation of learning". That is, trainers as people with subject and process expertise who create involving learning experiences centred on the participants and their learning rather than on themselves.

The popular push for the "learning facilitator" label is an understandable effort to leave behind some common perceptions of the label "training" as traditional, lecture-based, didactic, often authoritarian, non-participative, usually boring and ineffective.

So maybe Juliet was right, it doesn't matter what you call it so long as you are aware of attendees' expectations and work to fulfil or even delight them. I strongly believe that facilitator behaviours can dramatically enhance all forms of interpersonal communication whether you are training, presenting, facilitating, having a dinner party or even a one-on-one conversation. Behaviours like putting people at ease, asking questions, listening and reflecting will contribute to most situations.

Let me try to role-model what I am talking about here by asking what I believe is perhaps the most powerful (and sadly underused) question known to any presenter, trainer or facilitator.....

"What do you think?"

Please send your thoughts about "What's in a name?" to andrew@creativetraining.com.au