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Ask the expert

Questions:

1. If the audience is not interacting with you during the training what do you do?
2. How to keep learners' motivated and how to keep them engaged?

First of all, I would ask myself if planning before has taken place properly. If your training is designed the way that students' interaction and a student-centered approach has been chosen providing numerous different tasks to them, most of the audience will be motivated and follow your ideas and thoughts.

At the beginning of each training students need to be emotionally involved in the topic. You need to make them get interested in the topic and become curious. In order to find out what they would like to know or learn about you need to know your audience.

I would choose a proper way (method) that covers the answers to the following questions:

- a.) How far is the topic relevant to the students?
- b.) In what way have they already made experiences with the subject?
- c.) There might be experts in specific fields amongst the audience whom you could involve in your training actively.
- d.) What might be an interesting question of each of your audience that could be answered by you?

Finding the answers to these questions could be done by means of questionnaire, partner-interview, student-presentations. As follows, I would invite students to raise questions to the topic. These can lead you through your presentation and give you a guideline. You then best know what is relevant and most interesting to them. Students' lack of interest is very often caused by a lack of relevance. However, it could also be that they may already know most of what you might think they should know. So, before you start your training or presentation, make sure you know their needs.

Do not underestimate the fact that if something does not mean anything to me, I may not listen carefully.

Further, you could think of providing situations, case studies or problems to them which have to be solved or elaborated.

Also, I would make sure that each presentation of the lecturer does not take too long. We know very well how long we can concentrate on one single issue and this is just a few minutes. Therefore, breaks and interaction can help you to keep the audience concentrated.



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Of course, there might be some more reasons for the audience to refuse interaction. On the one hand it could be caused by them not being used to asking questions but just behave as „good listeners“. However, this is hardly ever the case based on my experience. If your tasks are meaningful and doable to them students love to experiment and explore. This is human nature. Boredom and demotivation are caused by various things, one of these is for sure mental underload.

On the other hand, there might be issues that trouble your audience such as exams before or after your workshop, for instance. It can also be that they have already covered the topic various times beforehand, perhaps with another lecturer. Or they may simply believe they already know everything they should. Therefore, I advise you to have various activities or tasks at hand to choose from. These should also vary in the level of difficulty. Why not challenge your students before your presentation to show them that there is still a bit that they need to know to fulfil a task.

All in all, I do believe if you can involve your students by giving them work to do or questions to answer by listening to you, there is a good chance that they will follow. Further, you can provide them with an overview of your presentation and let them choose what to discuss or concentrate on.

If you, as the lecturer, are flexible enough you can let them participate actively.

I would suggest to think of methods that make them talk and discuss or try out after giving them brief input and presenting expert know-how which they may need in order to fulfil the tasks set.

Moreover, I would advise you to find various ways of how to transfer know-how. It is not only the audience listening to you, but it could also be done by showing them a video, making use of any kind of realia¹ to make the trainings more interesting. A variety in activities is quite helpful. Regular change in activities and settings is necessary.

Finally, if you guide your audience, you lead them and they will follow. And we all know, the best leader is the one who questions.

Answered by: Susanne Czachs (<http://www.die-bildungsberater.at/>)

¹ In education, realia are objects from real life used in classroom instruction by educators to improve students' understanding of other cultures and real life situations.