

# A Trainer's "Old Kit Bag"

By Sue Vineyard



In my own training of trainers over 25 years, they frequently asked about the tools that would be most critical to their success. I always suspected some of folks doing the asking really wanted me to reach into my briefcase and whip out a brochure for a "Never-Fail, Handy-Dandy Foolproof Kit for Trainers ..... just \$19.95 if ordered today!"

In addition, they were often expecting that I'd tell them which of the growing mountain of electronic gizmos, perfect software or magical laser pointers would guarantee them an easy success. Oops, sorry! There are no such products.

Good trainers understand that there are no gimmicks for our profession. They do, however, have a clear understanding of some basic "truths & tools" which are the foundation of effective, impactful and relevant training.

As for the "items" outstanding trainers must have, let's start with four which need to be in place before real learning can be transferred from trainer to trainees, regardless of the subject matter:

- #1: Understanding what Training is and is Not
- #2: Reality
- #3: Solid Information
- #4: Body Armor



## Tool Number One: What Training Is and What it is Not...

Training is not a separate, isolated function of management.



It is the foundation on which the success of all the functions of an organization must depend if they are to attain their dynamic goals. Not only does training's strength impact the bottom line, its' quality level predetermines that bottom line.

Top trainers believe this wholeheartedly and are therefore passionate about guiding trainees to success. They feel the weight of their responsibility to equip people effectively, using a variety of ways to teach, coach, instruct, demonstrate, inspire and enthuse those before them to be the best they can be.

At the same time, quietly tucked in the corner of their own heart, effective trainers know that although most people believe Charles Lindberg was the world's most important and influential aviator, it was truly whoever actually taught Lindberg how to fly!

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## Tool Number Two: Reality!

Training is hard work. Forget any glamorous vision of flying to exotic places, luxurious hotel rooms, gourmet dining and after-hours visits to exciting landmarks if you are a traveling trainer.

It's just as likely that your hotel room is next to the world's noisiest elevator, the room temperature is too hot/cold, your plane arrived late and the food provided is from some animal you've never heard of or prefer not to eat.

If you are an "in-house" trainer, your event can occur after your youngest child cried all night, your teenager didn't come home until 3 a.m., a water pipe burst in the kitchen after dinner and your car wouldn't start in the morning.

To deal with whatever reality of life you encounter, you need the ability to live in the "now" and leave all the personal baggage behind if you are to be at your best in the front of the training room. Good trainers have an ability to compartmentalize their life, allowing them to focus on the job at hand. Forget the tricky laser pointer. It's the laser focus of your mind's eye that is required.

My more mundane suggestions:

- Never check your briefcase at the airport
- Carry earplugs and granola bars in your luggage
- Be confident in your training ability
- Have some fun
- Wear comfortable shoes

- Purchase clothing with pockets (for throat lozenges etc.)
- Drink plenty of water



## Tool Number Three: Solid Information (checked twice!)

Whether training in-house or externally at a different site, be sure to do your homework. Nothing will undermine a trainer more than poor, incomplete or skewed information, or even worse: assumptions.

It is deadly to face an audience without understanding:

- #1: The MISSION of the organization or entity
- #2: Goals and objectives that come from and are designed to fulfill this mission\*
- #3: Organizational climate and existing norms (unwritten or written "rules")
- #4: Typical management style
- #5: How success is measured: for workers, management, hierarchy, governing boards, stakeholders, etc.
- #6: Reward systems and attitudes

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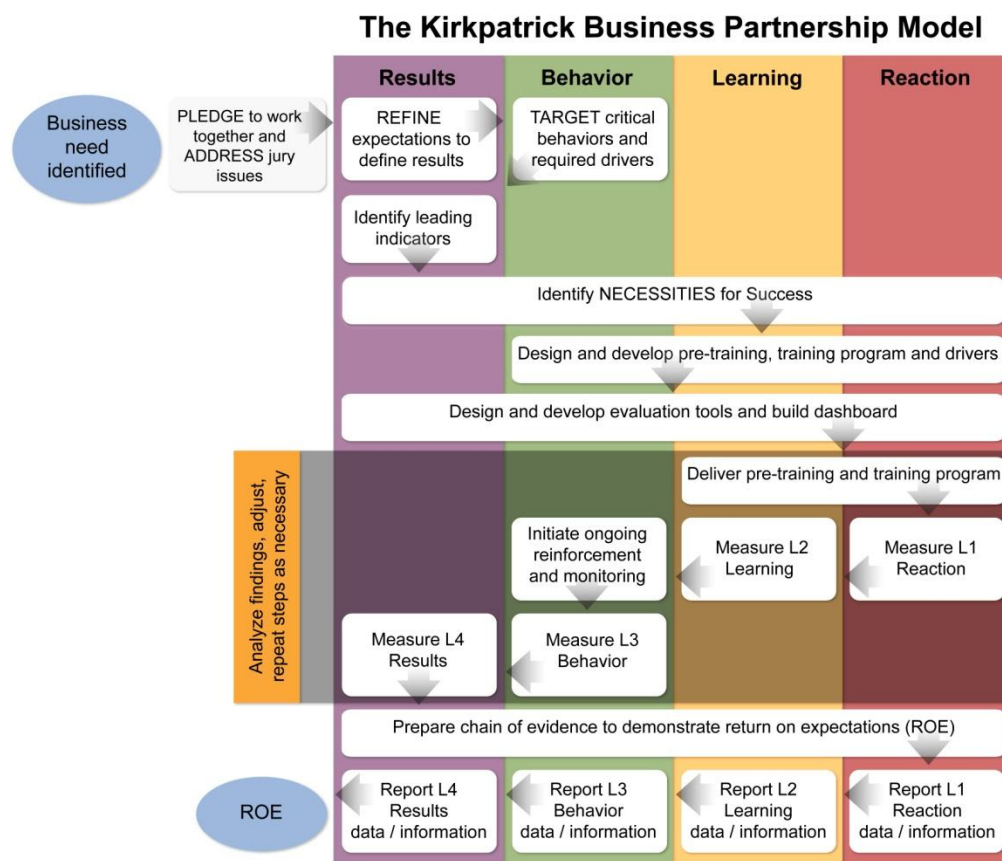


#7: What is expected of you as a trainer, of trainees following the training

#8: Goals of the training

\*Be careful. If you find an organization that has a stated mission that is really broad (i.e.: "To Cure Poverty" or "To Introduce and be the No. #1 Provider of our Products/Services in North America") but they have no specific strategies in place (Goals, Objectives, Plans of Action, etc.), you

may need to intervene to coach them to create them. There are five steps in the management process that make missions happen: Planning, Organizing, Staffing, Directing and Assessing. Under these five are the specific steps required to turn dreams into reality: Goals, Objectives, Plans of Action, Job Designs, Recruitment, Interviewing, Placing, Training, Supervising and Evaluating. There will be more about this process in a future article; it is also congruent with the Kirkpatrick Business Partnership Model.



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It also goes without saying that (often unspoken) expectations by the organization for the trainer include the highest level of professional competencies in:

- Training skills
- Communication skills
- Mastery of the subject matter
- Audience management
- Establishment of a positive learning climate
- Assessment of learner's absorption of information during the training with appropriate program adjustments
- Competency
- Confidence

The bottom line for trainers in acquiring and using base data is to never assume anything. Get the real facts by doing your homework. Avoid getting information from just one source; their perspective

can be skewed. Be sure to get information from those folks who must do the grassroots work in the organization. Don't think you know everything just because you've read the Annual Report; it is typically written to impress stockholders and potential investors.

## Tool Number Four: Body Armor!

This last tool mentioned here is a thick skin! Training is one profession that insists its practitioners be judged every time they perform. Good, constructive evaluation is always needed. Feedback is good if it is relevant, but those traveling trainers I mentioned before must often also deal with organizations that insist on their own evaluation tools, some of which are at best irrelevant and at worst, silly.

The Kirkpatrick Model is the exception to the rule of inappropriate in-house evaluation tools as it hones in on what is really important to strategic success of an organization. It measures results that are tied to the mission and goals of an entity. It helps trainers to be more effective and caring, strategic professionals.

### Level 1: Reaction

To what degree participants react favorably to the learning event

### Level 2: Learning

To what degree participants acquire the intended knowledge, skills and attitudes based on their participation in the learning event

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## Level 3: Behavior

To what degree participants apply what they learned during training when they are back on the job

## Level 4: Results

To what degree targeted outcomes occur, as a result of the learning event(s) and subsequent reinforcement

It is not designed to force trainees to make frivolous judgments of trainers, thus avoiding the “walks-on-water” to “worst idiot on the planet” scoring options. It does not ask such silly questions such as: “Of all the training and teaching you have ever experienced, where would you rank this one?” Or my personal favorite: “Did you think the trainer was nice?” (Yes, those are real evaluation questions I encountered as I trained!) Yuck.

Effective assessment tools are invaluable to trainers, as they provide good information that allows them to hone and improve their training skills, materials and audience relationships in the future. They are measurement tools that help solidify the base of future effectiveness as it impacts the bottom line of an entity. They should never be personal attack vehicles, irrelevant or skewed to their designer’s personal agenda.

Allow me share one tip that is personal, and I learned it the hard way: When and if you do training where silly, irrelevant or even nasty questions are asked (the opposite of the Kirkpatrick Model), never read them immediately after you have finished training!



You deserve a day or more to know you did the best job you could in light of the information provided and training circumstances. If someone says you were the worst ever, chuckle lightly and “file” the silly evaluation in the nearest wastebasket!





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Always remember that there may be a participant or two who came NOT to learn and must therefore find a way to negate the training or trainer. In such instances, I reminded myself of Abraham Maslow's wise teaching: "Refusal to learn is more deeply a refusal to do."

## Conclusion:

These four tools: Understanding what Training Is/Is Not, Reality, Solid Information and a Thick Skin, are critical to good training and outstanding trainers. Other tools we can talk about in the future include:

- Understanding people's learning styles
- Disney's levels of learning
- Secrets of motivation
- The caring art of "friend-raising"

All mix together to create passionate, impacting, relevant learning that transforms people, programs, products and projects.

If all of that is not enough information, allow me to share two quotes which sum up much of what I've offered here:

*"If you want a year of prosperity, grow grain. If you want 10 years of prosperity, grow trees. If you want 100 years of prosperity, grow people."*

Chinese Proverb

*"Never promise what you can't deliver."*

Mae West



Sue Vineyard is a retired training professional best known for decades of work in helping not-for-profit organizations to accomplish their missions through a focused, self-sustaining approach. Sue now enjoys oil painting and spending time with her grandchildren. She resides in Wisconsin.