TIPS FOR TRAINERS DEBRIEFING A TRAINING

Every training we facilitate or co-facilitate is unique. Whether it's the participants learning needs, the physical space of the classroom, the length of the training, or the fact that none of the markers are working, each training has its own dynamic factors which influence the experience for participants and facilitators alike.

One of the most effective ways for facilitators to continue to grow and develop as educators is through a commitment to ongoing reflection. Taking time to debrief after each training or workshop creates important opportunities to notice what is working well and what can be improved in the future.

Depending on the context, debriefing can take anywhere from 10 minutes to a couple hours. Like preparation, the amount of attention that you put into debriefing should correspond to the length and significance of the training and your experience. For example, a new facilitator often spends many hours preparing, even for a fairly brief presentation, whereas an experienced facilitator may be able to prep for a several hour training with much less time. Similarly, a new facilitator should plan a thorough debrief after each training, as much of their learning will happen through reflection and integration of participant feedback & evaluation.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Our intuition and gut feelings are a powerful source of information. Immediately after a training, it can be helpful to take a moment to notice your first thoughts or impressions about how it went. Ask yourself:

- □ How did I feel overall? Do I feel like the training was a success?
- □ Looking back over the training, as a whole, what stands out?
- □ What moments felt especially alive or engaged?
- □ Which moments felt more flat or like participants were bored or disengaged?

There will be time to do more in-depth evaluation later, but these first impressions often reveal a lot about where the training really came to life, and which sections might need more development.



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QUICK EVALUATION

Because facilitation is such a multi-dimensional process, it can be helpful to reflect on the various aspects of the training one at a time. In each domain, ask yourself:

□ What worked well about this aspect of the training? For each thing that worked well, can you identify what made this possible? This reflection will help you to maintain the successes of this experience over time.

For example: One success was that all the participants arrived on time, which meant that I was able to start on time, stick to my agenda, and use the time well. Something that made this possible was that the organization sent a reminder email that went out the day before the training.

□ What didn't work well about this aspect of the training? For each thing that did not work, can you identify what caused this obstacle? Is there anything that you could do differently next time to prevent this from happening again? Taking the time to be in this kind of reflection will help you to integrate new learnings out of each experience, allowing you to grow and improve as a facilitator over time.

For example: One thing that didn't work well was the timing of my agenda. An exercise I'd never done before took twice as long as I anticipated, and made the rest of the training feel rushed. Next time, I can do a trial run of the exercise with my coworkers and create a more realistic timeline for all the information that I want to cover.

Consider the domains below in evaluating the training:

Logistics (e.g. location, physical space, technology, bathrooms, timing & breaks, food & drinks, noise level & acoustics, coordination with hosting organization, etc.)

- □ What worked well about the logistics for this training?
- □ What didn't work well about the logistics for this training?
- □ For each thing that did/did not work, can you identify what contributed to this?
- What could you do again or differently in order to have an even more successful training the next time?



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Content (concepts & themes of the training)

- □ What concepts or themes did participants seem to respond or connect to most?
- □ Were there any concepts that participants didn't seem to understand?
- □ Were there any hard questions that came up that you felt underprepared for?
- □ What is one thing you'd like to learn, read, or do before the next training?

Process (pace of training, mood/atmosphere of the learning environment, learning activities, etc.)

- □ What worked well during this training? Which moments did the group really seem to come alive, or "gel"? How could you tell?
- □ What didn't work as well during this training? Which moments did the group seem tense or disengaged or shut down? How could you tell? What do you think happened there?
- □ What could you do again or differently in order to have an even more succesful training the next time?

Participant Feedback:

No matter how long you've been facilitating or how skilled you are, it is impossible to see everything about how a training went from the perspective of the participants. A critical ingredient in successful debrief is participant feedback—asking the participants what worked and didn't work for them. Some facilitators choose to integrate feedback into the training itself—asking participants to share aloud what worked well and what they would change. Others prefer to get written feedback from participants, while some facilitators value receiving both types of feedback.

As always, the amount of time and depth of the evaluation should be proportionate to the length and intensity of the training. It wouldn't be appropriate to spend ½ an hour of a 1.5 hour training doing evaluation, nor would it make sense to spend only 5 minutes inviting feedback after a day-long training. Choose an appropriate interval of time that allows participants to reflect on the experience they've just had. Feedback not only benefits the facilitator, but also supports the participants to reflect on and integrate their own learning.



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It is important to ask participants many of the same questions that you will be asking yourself.

- □ What worked well about this training? What stood out to you, or caught your interest? What was your key takeaway?
- What didn't work for you about this training, or what would you change? Why? Do you have any suggestions for what would have been more effective for your learning?
- □ What feedback do you have for me/us as a facilitator(s)? This can include facilitator knowledge of the topic, preparation, organization, clarity, or style.
- □ Other comments?

In Summary

Debriefing a training is as necessary a component of facilitation as adequate preparation. This time for reflection allows you to recognize areas of strength and weakness in your facilitation, to identify content areas and skills that require further learning & development, and to track for themes that emerge over time. This process will allow you to continue to improve your craft and to deepen your own learning. This practice also offers a powerful model for the students and participants whom you are inviting to join you in the process and journey of learning.

