During the past four years, we have held “Train the Trainer” tutorials at the annual Workshop & Symposium and each class has been full. I have also spent quite a bit of time in these columns focus on Application. How do we get students/participants to the Application level on Bloom’s taxonomy? (Recall: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation as the six cognitive levels.) It is a logical jump to have instructors know about Bloom’s taxonomy to ask – “are the trainers who are attending the T3 tutorials getting to the application level themselves?” and “Have we made a difference in the trainers?” I certainly like to think that the T3 effort has been worthwhile, but let’s take the opportunity to ask some of our repeat attenders! I asked a series of interview questions to some previous attendees so you could hear directly from them.

The following four instructors provided us with some great ideas: Rob Knake (A2LA), Vernon Alt (Northrop Grumman), Pam Wright (A2LA) and Mark Ruefenacht (Heusser-Neweigh). I found their responses very insightful and I hope you will too.

What is one thing you’ve learned in the past T3 sessions that you have implemented and found especially effective? Tell us about an example of a best practice that you’d like to share or an example activity that was fun and effective.

Rob: I learned to provide effective training exercises to keep the trainees engaged in the learning experience. I utilized the interview example suggested by Dilip Shah during my root cause training and I felt that was very effective. I have also learned to write a more descriptive and effective description of my training event to clarify expectations of the training audience.

Vernon: Taking the time up front for casual introductions (tell us something about yourself that others may not know) really breaks the ice and sets the tone for interaction during the session.

Pam: As a result of the past sessions I implemented a hands-on activity that was very effective; however it was conducted after all the material had been presented. For the next training event I plan to break the activity up into two sections and add some True/ False or other type of mini-quiz to break up the “lecture” portion and better gauge how the class is doing in understanding the concepts.

Mark: Three things come to my mind immediately. 1) Effective use of questions and/or comments that engage the participants in dialogue. For example, at the end of a section, instead of asking, “Who has any questions?” A simple re-wording of “What questions do you have?” naturally leads the participants into asking questions instead of feeling that they have a question but are afraid to ask or afraid they are the only person in the class with a question. 2) In metrology we are often teaching or communicating very technical information. Train-the-trainer has taught me that no matter how technical the subject may be it is critical to keep verbiage on a PowerPoint slide minimized. It is important to use a maximum of five lines in large font with the most important point(s); preferably in a bullet list format instead of a long paragraph. 3) Continuing from keeping PowerPoint slides simple with only key points, presenters must not read the slides…speak to the participants, not to the slides. The slides simply highlight key concepts and help the presenter remain focused on the outline of the presentation.

What is one thing you’ve learned, that you would like to see other trainers implement?

Rob: I would like to see more trainers implement training exercises that engage the audience. A lot of trainers spend time reading off of slides which makes it hard to pay attention throughout the training.

Vernon: Use Bloom’s Taxonomy to set realistic goals for their training sessions. It would require very light subject matter to reach the analysis level in a one hour session.
Pam: I think trainers need to include much more hands-on learning and fewer lectures.

Mark: Be prepared! Have your slides printed and available to follow throughout the presentation. Know your material. Engage the participants (dialogue, activities, etc.) by not simply lecturing.

What is your number one challenge as a trainer?

Rob: I often find it hard to create meaningful exercises that will meet the training needs of a broad spectrum of attendees. It is hard to keep things general enough that anyone can get valuable information from an example but also put enough technical information into the example to meet the needs of a technician or a lab manager for example. This is also a struggle when developing the course material. I often don't have a demographic on the audience when preparing the course so it is hard to tailor to the audience. Many times I am preparing a course based on a perceived need and promoting it to a target audience. I attempt to adapt as knowledge of the audience is attained (through registration or during the actual training) but this is one of the biggest challenges I find.

Vernon: Educating the management who requests training is the number one challenge. They feel that any subject matter expert can transfer their knowledge to any size group in a remarkably short training session. It can be a training session in itself to get management to understand that adult learning differs from grade school and to realize that the variables involved at the individual student level influences their level of comprehension and retention.

Pam: My number one challenge is having enough time to develop and test the training course before offering it to the public.

Mark: My number one issue is being able to have advance contact with students to advise them on learning objectives, prerequisites, and timely and essential preparation before a session.

What do you love about the changes in your own training as a result of participating in T3 sessions?

Rob: I love the interactions with other trainers and sharing of ideas. I have “stolen” things from many participants.

Vernon: I love the fact that I can get a better idea of what the students take away from training and improve the lesson plan. Prior to T3 sessions I foolishly and dangerously believed that when I provided training, the student was totally responsible for smelling what I was cooking. I now have a better understanding and appreciation for the integration of material, student and trainer.

Pam: As a result of changes I have made, I get instant feedback on whether the audience is “getting it” or not and I have more contact and discussions with the participants.

Mark: I love engaging with the participants. Helping participants learn and master challenging technical concepts is exciting for me. Seeing a participant have that “light-bulb moment” as a result of engagement (dialogue, activity, Q&A) is very satisfying as an instructor.

Other thoughts you’d like to share?

Rob: I have enjoyed the train the trainer sessions and look forward to attending many more to improve my skills as a relatively new trainer.

Pam: I am currently struggling with how to take this same approach when presenting a paper versus teaching a tutorial. This would be a helpful focus for future “Train the Trainer” events.

Mark: The T3 tutorials have assisted me in being a better trainer, obtaining feedback for continual improvement, and realizing how much I enjoy sharing knowledge.

As an instructor, what are your ideas and insights? Send me a message and let me know! Be sure to sign up for this year’s tutorials – we plan to have two half day Train-the-Trainer sessions this year. I’ll be teaching one on the components of an “excellent training program,” reviewing content from benchmarked educational standards, and providing specific examples on how to implement the standards.