

## Case Study – how *not* to train!

Martin, a District Council Monitoring Officer, is due to deliver a 1-day course on Managing Change for members of a Standards Committee whose roles are about to change quite significantly. He is new to the area and has not met any of the Committee before but he is an 'expert in change management strategies'. He is not sure how many participants there will be and has no idea what, if anything, they have been told about the course.

He feels he has prepared thoroughly by producing plenty of support materials on change management and an in-depth PowerPoint presentation. In fact, he enjoyed doing the PowerPoint presentation – it was the first one he had done completely on his own and he'd really gone to town on the animations and clipart. He couldn't wait to show it to them!

Unfortunately, he wakes up on the morning of the course feeling a bit the worse for wear and begins to regret the few beers he'd enjoyed with his mates the night before. He hasn't checked the directions to the training venue – the traffic is heavy, car-parking difficult and he arrives a bit later than he had intended.

He is surprised to find two of the delegates, Melanie and Sam have already arrived and are having an animated discussion in the training room. Sam corners him and wants to discuss her research into behavioural psychology relating to change management. He is concerned that he has yet to set up his laptop and, although he knows that he really ought to make time to speak to the delegates, he leaves them in the room alone whilst he goes off to look for an extension lead.

When he returns, he overhears a few comments from the assembled delegates who, by now, have been joined by several others. They sound a bit disgruntled about something but he decides to ignore it. At the appointed starting time, the delegates sit down in rows facing the front and go mysteriously quiet. He is almost ready, the projector and laptop are all connected (more by luck than judgement) and he can now concentrate on the training ...

## First session

To get the session started, he introduces himself briefly and points out the fire exits, but does not bother to clarify the aims and objectives. Martin talks at them; he wants to get as much across as possible whilst they are fresh and, as he knows he is good at 'presenting', he thinks it may be easier to just talk without using his PowerPoint presentation. The delegates start to get restless – but Tom comes to the rescue with a joke. Immediately afterwards Ben's phone buzzes. At this point, Martin decides on a break – but neglects to tell them what time to return.

## Break

Martin doesn't chat with them – instead he makes his own phone calls and reads his notes for the next session. The delegates re-appear in dribs and drabs ... there's little enthusiasm.

## Second session

They are all once again sitting facing the front. Martin decides to use PowerPoint to 'liven up' the session. He starts with his original slides which are full of valid information in a consistent bullet point layout. Unfortunately the extensive use of unfamiliar acronyms leaves the delegates feeling bewildered and they soon begin to get restless, muttering amongst themselves as they gaze around at the blank walls. Melanie is suffering from the 'droopy eyelid' syndrome but is disturbed by a latecomer from break who disrupts the session.

Perhaps his new whizzy PowerPoint slides will improve things. He suggests they talk amongst themselves whilst he changes to his new presentation. They are initially impressed (he thinks) with objects flying around but they soon lose concentration. Tom tells another joke which produces more interest than Martin's delivery and things start to get a little out of hand. He decides that it must be time for lunch.

## Lunch

With a hearty lunch and good conversation, time flies and everyone, including Martin, is late back.

## Third Session

The room feels warm, everyone looks weary. Even Martin has lost enthusiasm. He decides on a change of delivery method to give everyone a break. He distributes some information and activity handouts and asks the delegates to work through these for a while. The notes are pages and pages of very relevant text, but there are no illustrations and no concise instructions. Although Alan is happily making notes, the others seem a bit confused and start to talk amongst themselves.

Once again he realises that a change of activity is required so, without much forethought, he tries to get them into groups for a role play exercise. There's an odd number and he has difficulty in dividing them up, so they all stand around for a while. Finally he gets them into groups and gives out another set of instructions on paper. He sits down again and seems oblivious to the fact that not all the groups are joining in - they seem to be preoccupied and talking about something else.

## Break

Tamara collars him saying that theory is all very well but what has that got to do with her? She's likely to lose her job as a result of all these changes and a load of theory will not help her find another one! She gets quite aggressive about it and others start to join in. Martin decides he needs to get 'hands-on' in the next session. He'll get them each to express their deepest fears about the forthcoming changes and then reassure them with anecdotes from his own experiences.

## Final Session

When he introduces his 'sharing' idea, nobody wants to begin. It all feels a bit personal and they seem uncomfortable with Martin standing at the front with his arms folded across his chest. Unbeknown to Martin, Sarah had been burying her head in the sand when it came to thinking about the realities of the changes ahead. Feeling exposed and threatened in front of the group, she experiences a panic attack and rushes from the room in tears.

This is the final straw for Martin. He decides to call it a day and hands out some 'Happy Sheets'. The delegates complete them listlessly and ask if that means they can go now.

He dismisses them with a final 'have a nice weekend' and prepares to leave. He's not sure if they really understood the content and he wonders if he is supposed to be giving feedback to anyone after the course - he'll think about that later ... maybe. He feels vaguely dissatisfied with the day but can't put his finger on why ...