

Enterprise Development Training Course

DAY SEVEN - SESSION TWENTY FOUR

Course evaluation and follow up

Objective: to enable participants to draw together what they have learned, to apply evaluation techniques and to commit themselves to a specific action, which they will undertake on their return home, and thus to maximise the chances that participants apply some part of what they have learned in the course when they return to work. The evaluation will assist the instructor to improve the course in future.

Time: Approximately two hours

Materials

Sufficient copies of a final evaluation form and an action commitment form for all participants, examples of which are given at the end of this Session Guide.

Advance Preparation:

Participants should have been asked after the previous session on this, the final day, to rank each session anonymously on the following simple scale:

A = Excellent	B = Good
C = Mediocre	D = Waste of Time

The collated results of these simple immediate evaluations should be available for this session.

Session Guide

1. Ask participants why is it appropriate to devote one of the final sessions of this course to evaluation even though there are as yet no real results at all, since only the costs have been incurred so far? The benefits will only come later, when participants' apply what they have learned.

Elicit the response that you, the instructor, need to learn from the participants how you can improve the course next time. Indicate that you will also be obtaining further more meaningful evaluation data, later, but the various sessions are now fresh in participants' memories and you wish to find out as much as you can from them.

Ask how most school or university courses are evaluated. Who evaluates whom?

Teachers evaluate students, by tests and examinations. These may or may not be an effective way of finding out if students have learned to use, as opposed to write about, the things they are supposed to have learned, but a trainer in enterprise development, like any worker, must evaluate himself.

If our clients do not benefit from our assistance, we must change it. If trainees do not learn what we have tried to teach them, we must improve the teaching and the design of our courses.

2. Distribute the final evaluation form and ask participants to complete it without any discussion, to ensure that their views are not influenced by an articulate or talkative minority.

While they are completing this, if you have not already done it, collate the individual session ABCD ratings. Then go through the list to identify those sessions which were rated significantly worse than the majority, and certainly any which received more C and D ratings than A and B ratings.

3. Collect the final evaluation forms. Put them to one side and list on the board the less popular sessions you have just identified.

Go briefly through the list, and ask participants whether the sessions were badly rated because the topics were irrelevant or because they were badly taught.

It is most unlikely that any sessions will be badly rated by every single participant. Ask those who were in the minority and rated the unpopular sessions A or B to identify themselves and to defend the sessions in question. They may be unwilling to do this, but it is important to recognise that opinions can differ and that a few positive views can suggest changes of emphasis which will improve the majority rating next time.

Be prepared for and indeed invite criticism of your own performance. NGO staff have to learn to learn from their clients and to improve their performance on the basis of such feedback. You can personally demonstrate this behaviour in this session. Ask participants what changes they would recommend and ensure that these are noted and taken seriously. State clearly that badly rated sessions will be substantially changed or omitted in future, so that it is clear that evaluation is more than just a cosmetic exercise.

4. Now ask participants to write down in one sentence the most important thing they learned during the course.

Allow five or ten minutes for this and while participants are doing it, leaf quickly through their final evaluation forms in order to identify any common themes or particularly striking comments.

5. Ask participants to put their notes of the most important thing they learned to one side and to recall what they wrote in the final evaluation form a few minutes earlier.

Go through some selected responses and invite those who presented a minority view, whether it was positive or negative, to identify themselves and to explain their opinions. Obtain further comments as appropriate.

Participants in courses of this kind usually ask for more topics to be included rather than for unnecessary ones to be omitted, but they may also suggest that the course should be shorter or at least no longer, and that the daily workload should be reduced. Point out the inconsistency of this view, and invite suggestions as to how the course might be re-structured without increasing its duration and, thus, its cost and inconvenience to the participants' employers.

Summarise the changes you believe you will make, after a first hearing of participants' views, and thank them for their comments.

6. Ask participants one by one to read out the main thing they learned during the course. Summarise their statements on the board. If the emphasis is different from what you intended, try to find out why.

Then remind participants of the initial exercise they did, when they were made aware of the cost of the course and the necessity to earn a commensurate return. This final session marks the end of the spending and the costs and should be the start of the earning and the benefits. So the course at this point is like a machine which has been paid for and installed but has never produced anything, or a bicycle which has been bought but never used to go anywhere.

Ask participants to describe what they usually do on the first day after they return to work from a course or from any long period of absence. They have to pick up the threads, to answer emails, to write reports and to fit back into the domestic and office routine. It is very easy to allow this 're-entry' process to obliterate all memories of the course, however relevant it may have been.

What would they say to a client who bought a sewing machine with a loan but never used it?

7. Distribute two copies of the Action Commitment form to each participant and ask them to complete both, so that you can have a copy and they can keep a copy. If you have ready access to a photocopier they only need to complete one. This activity aims to provide a 'bridge' between the course and their job, and to increase the chances that participants will start to apply something of what they learned, even on the first morning at work.

Stress that they may, and probably should, commit themselves to something quite modest or even trivial, such as bringing certain records up to date, visiting one more client or even cleaning up an office so that it is a more efficient work place and a more welcoming environment for visiting clients. The commitment must be something which participants believe they can achieve on their own, without important new resources having to be made available from others in their organisations.

Experience has shown that if somebody makes a small change as soon as possible, it will be easier for her to make more important changes later. It is very easy to say what we cannot do, because we need other people's agreement or assistance. It is more difficult but far more productive to say what we can do, on our own. Large-scale improvement only comes from individual small-scale efforts and participants should remember the famous saying:

"Nobody ever made a greater error than he who did nothing because he thought he could do so little".

8. Remind the participants that what they learn from and with one another is more important than what they learn from an instructor. Then say that you are going to ask each participant in turn to come to the front of the room and briefly summarise his action commitment, stressing in particular the verifiable point he will have reached by the date specified on the form.

Before each one does this, nominate one participant to comment on his colleague's action commitment, so that everybody will have the opportunity both to present and comment on somebody else's effort.

Allow two to three minutes for each one and a further one or two minutes for comment and questions, initially by the nominated respondent and then by other participants who may wish to assist. Stress that the comments should be positive; enterprise is about optimism and seeing opportunities where others see problems. It is easy but unhelpful to say why things cannot be done and better if comments are like these:

"Yes, that is a good idea, and have you thought about how you could extend it (or do it more quickly, more economically etc.) by doing....?"

or

"That would be wonderful, but you will need Mr. X to co-operate; why don't you try approaching him through Mrs. Y, he usually listens to ideas from her."

9. Be sure to collect the spare copies of the action commitment forms or photocopy them. Remind participants to keep their own, so that they will not forget what they have committed themselves to.

Ask for suggestions as to what you can do to help participants fulfil their undertakings. These may include:

- Writing to their employers, summarising the commitment and recommending support for it
- Writing a reminder to each participant a few weeks before the expiry of the period.
- Holding a one day reunion seminar a few days after the expiry of the period, to put participants under pressure to fulfil their commitments, and also to provide general follow-up support.

You should before the session have ascertained what you can do to follow up the action commitments, and also to evaluate the post-course performance and to plan for future training.

There is always a danger that the only result of a course is another 'follow-up' course. A short seminar may be useful but improvement in the field depends ultimately on participants themselves.

There is also a tendency for field staff to use their seniors' reluctance to accept new ideas as an excuse. Stress that change in organisations comes from 'below' as much as from the top, and they must have the courage and determination to promote improvements in which they believe.

Tell participants what you are going to do to support them, and reinforce the sense of commitment by reminding them yet again of their responsibility to their clients.