

# The Rights of Training

---

## *The Right Environment*

Why do entire training organizations fail? Why do students walk away from a learning activity wondering “what was that all about?” The simplest answer is that the organizers fail to get it right. In this series, we will take a hard look at what it takes to not only be successful, but to carry training to a higher level.

### **THE RIGHT CURRICULUM**

The students must be training using a curriculum designed for the job or tasks they are being asked to perform. Simply put, training must be about giving students something new, or allowing them to do something better.

### **THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT**

Students and instructors must have the right environment, including all the tools, training props, and resources necessary. The environment must be realistic, and free from distractions.

### **THE RIGHT STUDENTS**

Without students that are interested and engaged, having all the other pieces won’t save a training session. Students must have the information to arrive at the right place, at the right time, with the tools needed to succeed.

### **THE RIGHT INSTRUCTORS**

Instructors that are prepared, motivated and excited about teaching. Selecting and rewarding the right instructors helps ensure your training budget yields a return on your investment.

### **THE RIGHT TECHNOLOGY**

Far too many instructors and organizations today rely on technology to make up for poor planning, poor curriculum development, and poor instructional techniques. Applying technology in a manner that helps the student achieve the desired outcome is appropriate – replacing a good instructor with a poorly executed online program is not.

Together, understanding and applying these “rights” will help make your training programs stronger, your students happier, and yield a better return on your training dollar.

*The Rights of Training is provided as a tool for clients of Oak Tree Systems as part of an ongoing effort to help them gain insight into the business of training and help them obtain the maximum return on their investment in their TrainingForce installation.*

## The Right Environment

When you mention environment in the same sentence as training, thoughts of blackout curtains and LCD projectors are probably what pops into a coordinator's head. Certainly, the physical environment plays a huge role in whether training is successful. Remember that the training environment includes establishing the correct frame of mind as well. To get a better idea of what you should be considering, this guide will take a look at synonyms for *environment* as steps to ensuring that you provide the right one for training.

- Location
- Surroundings
- Situation
- Atmosphere

Not every learning activity, and subsequently not every learning environment, will be similar. As with selecting curriculum elements, the key is to tailor the environment in ways that help a student meet the expected student learning outcomes.

### Location

Selecting a location for a training session is rarely as easy as it seems. Some coordinators are lucky enough to have permanent teaching facilities; others either teach at a client's facility or have to find suitable space.

#### City & State

If you are conducting training at a remote location, think carefully about the actual city and state. Training sessions in the winter months can be attractive schedule-wise, but weather can wreak havoc on attendee travel even if you train in a year-round location. Remember that training in those year-round locations can be more expensive because winter is the busy time of year. Think about the driving distance and cost for potential students. Consider the diversity of lodging and eating establishments. Know your students and try to match with a city with a range of prices and amenities suitable for their income and background.

***TrainingForce Tip: A list of surrounding airports and accommodations can be listed in the registration document confirmation letter.***

**College towns can be an excellent option for conducting training during summer months.**

As you are considering a city and state, you should also consider the costs associated with production (Audio-visual equipment rental, staging, lighting, etc.) and moving your training materials to the remote location. People have become accustomed to being able to ship overnight. Delivery and shipping companies are vulnerable to weather and travel disruptions also, and being caught without critical training materials can be a huge problem.

## Training Site

There are always options when it comes to selecting the building and room(s) for training. Often, coordinators get locked into a particular site even though it is obviously not the best selection because it is a favorite word – free. Remember the old cliché though; you get what you pay for. Sometimes a small investment in a hotel conference room (especially if you’re staying in that hotel) can save you the embarrassment of teaching in a room without air conditioning. The type of training you are going to deliver definitely comes into play also; great classroom facilities at a hotel may not be a factor if you’re teaching a hands-on skill. Potential locations can be local colleges, community rooms at fire or police stations, and hotels. You may even find a local for-profit training center that may be willing to barter with you.

*TrainingForce Tip: Be sure to include detailed directions and information about the location and room when setting up the class in TrainingForce Manager. You can insert this information directly into your registration confirmation documents as merged fields. The telephone number of the physical location is a key piece of information that should be in every registration confirmation.*

Sometimes coordinators also feel an imperative to teach at a specific location; such as conducting a session for athletic trainers at a sports venue. Coordinators should not feel tied to a specific location unless that location truly benefits the students. If your program consists of a classroom, uses easily moved props or materials, and can be done inside – students may appreciate you finding a better location than the football locker room and benches. On the other hand, if your program requires a lot of resources and will take place on the field, you may be locked into a less-than-desirable location for at least part of the session. The important part is that each coordinator thinks carefully about what you are asking the student to do and give them the best location possible for it. You should consider creature comforts as well when picking out the site and room. Develop a list of potential sites in the area, and then take a look at the surroundings of each site.

*TrainingForce Tip: Resource slots can be created to assign students to use training resources at specific times throughout the class. Materials may be assigned to a class that a student may need during the training process.*

## Checklist

- What is the shape of the room? Rooms that are square tend to work best.
- Does the room appear clean and well-maintained?
- Is the work space for each student adequate?
  - Does each student have space (allow 3’ per student)?
  - Are the chairs comfortable?
  - Does each student seat provide an adequate view of the instructor and presentation?
  - Does each student have secure storage space?
  - Does each student have power / internet access (WiFi code) if needed?

- Evaluate floors and walls. Floors should be carpeted, and walls free from items that aren't specifically meeting-related. Avoid black and brown painted rooms in favor of warm, pastel-colored rooms when possible.
- Are the room's environmental controls accessible? If not – who has access?
- Are the room's lighting controls appropriate for the class?
  - Can individual lights be turned off selectively to accommodate a presentation?
  - Can any natural light be blocked out?
- Are there adequate restroom facilities for the expected student count?
- Is there a student lounge or similar area, with drinks and snacks for purchase if not provided?
- Identify potential distractions. Can they be managed or controlled?
- Check for noise. Potential sources include HVAC systems, from hallways or other rooms, or from outside the building.
- Are there any safety issues? Pay special attention to stairs.
- Is the facility compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act?

## Surroundings

Once you've identified your city, state and a few potential locations you should consider the surroundings. Do thorough research before committing to a specific venue. Are any of the potential sites under the final approach pattern for the airport? Is there construction going on in the immediate area that will inhibit traffic or create a distraction? What is the traffic situation at/near the site? If you are unfamiliar with the area, talk with local public safety officials to find out if there are any crime or known issues. All of these can make for an unpleasant student experience.

If you're working with a site and your group will not be the only activity they are hosting that day, talk about the details of other activities. Are they of a competing nature? Will the other activities present a distraction for students? A coordinator recently hosted a session in an absolutely wonderful classroom overlooking the foyer in a Las Vegas hotel; he had used this location frequently with no issues and had always been an excellent choice. The coordinator realized about halfway through the afternoon session his students were spending more time watching a celebrity wedding in the foyer and he lacked a way to block their view.

One resource a coordinator should consult is the convention and visitors bureau web site if the area has one. In smaller towns the government's economic development office or Chamber of Commerce may serve a similar function. Look at other events and facilities in the area and try to determine if any of their activities will impact your training.

## Situation

Creating the right situation for learning to occur is where you cross over from purely logistical concerns to creating synergy between the location, students, curriculum, and trainer. Setting up the proper situation begins with understanding the needs assessment that led to the training. Why is this training

occurring? What do you know about the audience? Understanding the audience extends beyond designing or selecting a curriculum that's right for them – it involves creating the right situation so the curriculum can be implemented effectively.

If the training is occurring to correct a problem or is simply employer-mandated refresher training and involves mainly experienced personnel, use changes in the environment to counter the negative attitude that seems to prevail. If past classes have been taught in a company break room, consider moving the class to the board room or off-site. If you anticipate student negativity, provide food and beverage. Even coffee and doughnuts (Dunkin' Donuts coffee coupled with hot Krispy Kreme doughnuts!) before an early morning session can help create a more positive situation for the instructor. If the material has been taught by the same instructor, consider using a different trainer or encourage a different instructional method.

**Two proven ways to improve the morale and attitude of a class are to offer food and freebies.**

Another way coordinators can improve the situation is to improve the status of the program in the student's eyes. Telling students that a program is important doesn't have much of an impact. Having the president of the company, or an outside speaker with direct experience introduce the training session not only improves credibility, but carries the unspoken message that training is important. This is especially true if the training occurs during "off hour" times or on weekends. The company president showing up on Sunday morning at 7:00 AM to start off a training session can make an impression. It makes even more of an impression if they stay and participate, but that is somewhat unrealistic for most programs.

**If you are going to have a special guest or executives are going to make an appearance, let the appearance be a surprise if possible.**

There are other ways to help establish a good environment:

- Ensure paper and pen or pencils are positioned at each student's seat.
- Place a business card from each instructor for each student.
- Place the day's agenda, along with a list of expected student learning outcomes, for each student.
- Have instructors dress similarly for the day. Students appreciate being able to rapidly identify staff members.
- Depending on the class, use name cards at their seat or name tags for all participants. This is especially important if the student is paying a fee for a class.

## **Atmosphere**

Establishing the correct atmosphere once training begins is equally important. Making the effort in the areas of location, surrounding and situation will go a long way to ensure you have the correct

environment. All of your hard work can be undone easily by a single instructor who brings a negative tone to the class.

### **When Students Arrive**

What do students see when they first arrive at training? As the cliché goes, you don't get a second chance to make a first impression. Do they see an instructor rushing to set up? How are the instructor(s) dressed? Ensure any sign-in or registration processes are rehearsed and run smoothly. Avoid creating long lines of people just waiting to get in the door! Was there a member of the instructional staff assigned as a greeter and to answer student questions as they arrive?

*TrainingForce Tip: Use sign-in sheets to track student attendance. Sign-in sheets can be accessed from both TrainingForce Manager and LaunchPad.*

### **The First Five Minutes**

The first instructor to speak at the beginning of the session has a huge responsibility. What he or she says, their demeanor, and even their body language establishes a huge part of the atmosphere for the class. How many times have you heard an instructor open with any of the following comments:

- “I know this is the same training as last year, but you have to do it.”
- “You guys are the best but management says you need to go through this class.”
- “This is as boring for me as it is for you.”

Statements like these undermine all the planning and effort a coordinator has put into establishing the right situation needed for learning to occur.

**Once an instructor sets a negative tone, the damage is done. Stay positive.**

### **Time**

Time is a huge component of keeping the right atmosphere. First, consider your program's start time – are your students driving in from a distance? Don't set a class start time that means half the class had to be up at 4 AM just to make it on time. Consider the duration, and nature. Instructors should never talk longer than the student chair's comfort. Avoid “all classroom” days whenever possible; use hands-on or interactive elements to break up the day.

Showing respect for a student's time in class is critical. The classroom should be ready so that the instructor can start on time. Stay on schedule throughout the day. Just as ensuring the information presented has value equal to or greater than the time spent; punctuality demonstrates your respect. Think about this scenario: a student calls the lead instructor fifteen minutes before class is to start, saying he will be ten minutes late for class. Should the instructor delay the start of class for a single student? What message does this send to the students that arrived on time?

If the training consists of multiple sessions going on at the same time, appoint a single individual as the schedule master. This person is assigned the responsibility for keeping multiple groups and instructors

on time. They can use a PA or radio system to give pre-emptive announcements (10 minutes left, time to switch).

## Outdoor Training

There are many skills that require a trainee to do skills demonstrations or scenario-based training outside. These training evolutions present a completely different set of challenges for the coordinator.

### Logistics

Logistical concerns are the top priority when planning an outdoor training session.

- How will students move from one location to another? Using personal vehicles may be ok, but consider the implications if there is a collision during training. Often the easiest way is by passenger van, bus or tram with an operator approved by the vehicle and property owner. Walking is rarely a good answer to the movement question, as students become distracted and wander.
- If teaching skills at a remote location how will you handle breaks and bathroom issues? Consider the use of portable toilets, or allow time in your agenda for transportation to/from the common area.
- Communications between instructors and organizers can be challenging; consider the use of two-way radios to avoid constant use of a mobile phone.
- Ensure that appropriate safety resources are available and that all instructors know the procedures in the event of an emergency. Be sure you know where first aid kits and material safety data sheets are located.
- Remember to keep student groups small and active. Students that are waiting in line develop a negative attitude quickly; ensure there is a plan to keep the students busy.
- If skills are being taught in close proximity, use temporary fencing or other structures to keep groups from mingling together or getting distracted. Provide educational distractions to keep students from finding one of their own.

### Weather

A coordinator almost has to consider the weather forecast in the same breath as logistics. There truly is no such thing as “perfect weather” for outdoor training. Here are some points to consider related to the weather:

- Review the weather forecast at 10, 7, and 3 days out. Develop “weather plans” based on the high temperature, low temperature, precipitation / wind, and severe weather possibilities.
- If it will be above 80 degrees Fahrenheit, consider it a hot day. Plan for plenty of shade in skill areas, using tents if air-conditioned space isn’t available nearby. Keep coolers of bottled water or sports drinks on hand at each station. If it will be below 65 degrees Fahrenheit, consider it a cold day and plan accordingly.

- Remember that your student audience may have a different perception of hot or cold than the instructor. For example, students from Florida will perceive a 60° F day differently than a student from Quebec, Canada.
- If severe weather is a concern, create a plan and share it with instructors. Know safe shelter locations and emergency signals.
- Understand how temperature and wind extremes can affect equipment and props. Be sure all instructors understand the parameters of safe operation, and how to act when those parameters are exceeded.

### Realism

One of the main reasons coordinators choose to train outdoors is to foster realism during skills or scenario-based training. Choosing to do this type of training can be very effective, but also very costly. Coordinators should take steps to ensure that the training ground is used efficiently to get the maximum return on investment. Plan to create the most realistic environment possible, within the parameters of safety, efficiency/student throughput, and budget.

- Extreme realism can significantly extend the amount of time to reset props and tools between groups. Plan to have multiple activities set up, and use support or logistics personnel reset props while instructors continue moving students through evolutions.
- Simulating, or simply “talking through” elements of a scenario or skill defeats the purpose of setting up a realistic situation. Allow plenty of time for each group to actually perform.
- Remember how students learn hands-on skills. Simply performing once, then undergoing a critique and moving to another station is not the answer. Use skills stations and scenarios to allow students to practice multiple times, with opportunity for feedback from the training staff between efforts.

### In Closing

Establishing the right environment is much more than walking in the room and turning on the equipment. Training organizers should think carefully about setting up the right environment so that students get the most out of the training program.