

Preparing a Workshop

Lesson Introduction

As leaders, we may be called upon to teach others at some point. But where do you begin? Putting together an educational workshop may seem like a daunting task, but there are some steps that you can take to make the planning process much easier.

Lesson Objectives

Upon completion of the lesson, the learner will:

1. Describe the process of developing an educational workshop
2. Put the steps into action by creating a workshop outline.

Lesson Content

So you've been called upon to present an education workshop for a group. Where do you begin? Chances are that if you've been invited to do a workshop, you've been introduced to a member of the group to whom you're giving the talk. Your first step in workshop planning begins with this person, the gate keeper. From this person you will need to get a slew of information that will provide you with the foundation for workshop planning: along with the topic, the time you will present, to whom you are presenting, how many will be present, how long your talk should be, where you will be presenting, is this a part of a separate event or is your talk the event, and any other facts that would prove beneficial for you as you plan. All of these facts will come into play as you move forward with planning your workshop. Once you have answered these questions completely, you can move on to the next stage of planning.

The second begins by asking yourself a few questions; What does the audience want to hear? What do you want the audiences to know/be able to do? What are the major points of your presentation? How will I illustrate those points? How will you summarize your presentation? What's the link? How will you motivate them? This begins a brainstorming process that is crucial to formulating a great presentation. If you need to, write down your ideas as they come to you. That way you have a "bank" of ideas that you can go back to at any time to beef up your presentation or help spur other ideas. Once you have your idea bank, you can move on to actually creating an outline.

When you write an outline, you are essentially creating a skeleton of your talk. It's important to note, this is different than the notes that you may use to actually give the presentation. As has been mentioned in other lessons, you should think of your presentation like a story that you are telling. So as you start your outline, start at the beginning. Ask yourself the following questions:

- How will you introduce yourself (if not being introduced by someone else)?
- Will you include an icebreaker and if so, what kind (a joke you tell, or some kind of audience participation)?

Next, you will share the purpose of the presentation. Remember your brainstorming questions? Now is when some of them come into play. Ask yourself the following questions, and begin to build the framework of your presentation based on some of the ideas that you came up with during your brainstorming session.

- What does the audience want to hear?

- What do you want the audience to know?

Now the body of the presentation begins to develop naturally from the framework you've created. You now know what you want the audience to know; how will you help them learn that information? Refer to your brainstorming questions again and flush out your presentation based on the answers to the following questions:

- What are the main points of my presentation?
- How will I illustrate those points?

A 45 minutes talk should have no more than about five main points; remember you don't want to overload your audience, or provide them with too little information. You can arrange those points in one of the following ways:

- **Timeline:** Arranged in sequential order.
- **Priority:** The main points are delivered in order of increasing importance.
- **Problem/Solution:** A problem is presented, a solution is suggested, and benefits given.
- **Classification:** The important items are the major points.
- **Simple to complex:** Ideas are listed from the simplest to the most complex.

Here you will also begin to think about visual aids like posters, or power points, movie clips, music, photos, games or activities, etc. These are all ways to help you illustrate your points and help the audience members to understand the information you are presenting.

Finally, it will be time to wrap up your presentation. You'll refer back to your idea bank for the following time to the answers of the following questions:

- How will you summarize your presentation?
- What's the link between your presentation and their "real lives"?
- How will you motivate them to do whatever it is you're asking them to do?

The final two questions may be the hardest two to address, but they are also the most important. Illustrating the link between the information that you provide and the audience members' real lives is important if you want to establish a genuine connection with the audience. It also is essential if you want them to retain information. Think about listening to a talk about a subject on which you can not relate. Would you be able to maintain a high level of interest throughout the presentation? Probably not. By demonstrating that what you are talking about related to the audience members, you are showing that what you have to say is important, and greater than that, will be useful to the individuals present.

This idea of demonstrating the importance of your message also addresses the second question of motivation. If the audience can not relate to the information you are presenting, then asking them to take the next steps and act upon the information is futile. However, if you establish a connection, and show how what you are saying should be important to the audience, then you can easily encourage the group to act!

Always invite questions at the end of your talk as well. It shows the audience that you are interested in hearing what they have to say! Finally, it is very important to remember to thank whatever group you are speaking with for the invitation.

Practice, Practice, Practice

Practice is as important to preparing a workshop as any other piece. Once you've created your outline, you have essentially completed the plan, and practice is putting the plan into action. As you practice, you should spend time working on the delivery alone. Read through your notes and think about how you will tell your story. As you go through your practice sessions keep in mind that you're telling a story and make a plan for how you will vary your voice, use gestures and change your body language in order to enhance your overall message. When you have those different areas decided, you might try audio or video taping yourself and watching and listening it to see where you can improve your delivery. You should also plan to have a "dress rehearsal" of your presentation with a live audience, your friends, family, etc. During this dress rehearsal you should have all of your teaching tools with you so that you put the entire presentation together, just as you will when you deliver it to the audience who invited you.

Reflection Questions

- Why should we brainstorm before we begin writing an outline of a presentation?
- What are the kinds of things we need to think about as we prepare an outline of a presentation?
- How can we address the delivery of the main points of a presentation?
- What are ways to help illustrate the main points of a presentation?

References

Pennsylvania FFA Association. (2001). *State Officer Training Guide*