

Getting the Group Involved

Group involvement meets the needs of adult learners to build upon what they already know. It also builds teamwork among participants, keeps the interest level high, and aids retention.

A Chinese proverb says:
I hear and I forget;
I see and I remember;
I do and I understand.

If we want people to use what they have learned back on the job, they need to buy into the concepts or skills and retain them. Involvement is the key to both buy-in and retention.

There are some simple strategies for using group involvement effectively.

1. Arrange the room so people are only seated on one side of rectangular or round tables. Leave plenty of room between tables to move chairs and form groups.
2. Divide trainees into different groups about every 3 hours. Groups of 5-7 people are an ideal size – large enough to stimulate discussion, but not so large that people can get by without contributing.
3. Let the groups select their own leaders, facilitators, and recorders for the activities. Ensure roles are rotated regularly so everyone participates.
4. In group work, if there is only one right answer, make sure the groups have what they need to discover the right answer.
5. If there is a variety of acceptable answers (e.g., the qualities of a good leader), go with and build on the groups' answers.
6. Do not criticize, embarrass, or make jokes about participants. You'll lose the respect and the participation of the rest of the group.
7. Make an individual's problem the group's problem. If an individual asks a question, sometimes turn it back to the group and get input on possible answers.
8. Don't engage participants in a debate about who is right or wrong. Your job is to help people learn to use available resources to find the right answers.
9. Keep to time limits during group activities and feedback sessions. Facilitator loss of control is the major reason participants complain about group work.
10. Give people ways to interact with the material during the training. Have highlighters, post-it flags, colored dots, and scented markers on the tables. Encourage people to mark key concepts with these tools. Use copies of the overheads with some of the words missing so people have to fill in the blanks.