



Making Technical Training Effective

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When I was in high school, my favorite subject was chemistry. It was not the study of double or triple covalent bonds that I enjoyed, but rather the demonstrations. Our teacher, Mr. Abrams, would regularly stand before the class, strike a big grin, and announce “Aprons and goggles students,” and then proceeded to cause a chemical reaction that often led to a minor explosion. On a really good day, the room would fill with smoke and we would escape to the hallway.

Over the past eight years, I have had the good fortune of developing many technical training courses and seminars for the Enliten Management Group. These courses have focused on three technical disciplines: Digital Video Technology, Satellite Communications, and the Delivery of Media in the Enterprise. This subject matter can often prove tedious to some and amount to pure techno-babble to others. Our challenge has been to make these courses effective and meaningful, not just for the engineer, but for managers and executives as well. Fortunately, we have been successful without filling too many rooms with smoke.

Most successful training courses are developed using a proven process: define the learning objectives, develop the lesson plans, create the lessons, deliver the course, solicit feedback, and improve the course based on the feedback. Enliten has used this process to establish itself as a leader in delivering training in our selected disciplines. However, our determination to maximize the effectiveness of our courses has led us to focus on the following four mantras that define and differentiate our training organization:

Make It Relevant – We recognized early on that a “customized” training course is always more effective as a “canned” course. This is because the customized course directly addresses the issues that are relevant to the client and omits topics that provide limited value. Unfortunately, customized training courses can often be cost prohibitive to clients.

Our solution for this was to develop a modular approach to our training and seminars. Enliten has developed scores of training modules that run between 20 to 40 minutes. We provide our clients with overviews of these modules and then work together to craft a meaningful event. If a new module needs to be created, Enliten can develop it for a fraction of the cost associated with fully “customized” events. This approach has proven to be highly successful and of great value for clients.

Another method we use, and quite often encourage, is to work with members of our client’s staff to develop and present modules on their area(s) of expertise. Typically,

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they know their respective subject matter as well as anyone and its value to the organization. We simply provide the framework and guidance to articulate the information in a meaningful, professional manner. These modules are always well received and really help to drive the relevance of the training or seminars home for attendees.

Create Memorable Demonstrations – A well-crafted demonstration can engage an attendee in a manner that standard classroom training cannot. These technology demonstrations are excellent tools when explaining difficult technical topics to a non-technical audience. Attendees often remember the key points of the demonstration long after the event.

Enliten tirelessly searches for new tools to enable demonstrations. We often find these tools in analysis software that provides a visual representation of a complex technical subject.

One of our best-received demonstrations is in our Digital Video training where software is used to analyze video clips that have been encoded using both MPEG-2 and MPEG-4 compression technology. This software provides a visual representation of how each frame of video is divided into macroblocks, encoded, compressed, and then produces data on the compression efficiency of the video clips. The instructor then compares and contrasts the data. In this demonstration, attendees gain, and retain, an understanding of the differences between MPEG-2 and MPEG-4 that would require a full day of classroom training.

For other applications, Enliten employs advanced presentation software – such as Macromedia Flash – to help maximize the effectiveness of the technical training.

Tell The Story – Another technique Enliten employs is including historical perspective into our presentations. Technical history is ripe with tales of discovery, politics, and colorful characters. The stories engage attendees while subtly incorporating high-level perspective for important technical elements.

Enliten's technical training team members are not only well-respected engineers, but also technologists. Our training includes discussions on the evolution and convergence of technology. These discussions provide attendees with the necessary perspective to make informed decisions regarding their own technology roadmaps and purchases.

Share The Passion – Above all else, we are passionate about training and the technology that enables our particular disciplines. We believe that this passion shines through in our training and seminars. Passion is also contagious. Our clients often come back to us months after an event and comment on the positive effect our enthusiasm has had on their culture.

When I think back to Mr. Abrams and that chemistry class, I realize that his passion and approach to being an effective teacher was very similar to the Enliten approach. I think he would have enjoyed being a part of our dedicated team.