

Publications[SAVE](#) | [EMAIL](#) | [PRINT](#) | [MOST POPULAR](#) | [RSS](#) | [SAVED ARTICLES](#) | [REPRINT](#)**Knowing Who's Who: Going Back to the Playground to Build More Powerful Training Programs**

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By Katharine Giacalone

Let's face it. Training programs are deemed successful when the curriculum, delivery, and participation are in sync. Sounds like motherhood and apple pie, right? So why aren't all training programs successful?

Maybe the curriculum is well written, but the delivery isn't on the mark, or the delivery is awesome but participants didn't get what they thought they signed up for, or worse yet, the curriculum was too cumbersome, making the delivery next-to-impossible, leaving behind frustrated and confused participants. That's how it can happen! If you recall in my recent article in the November issue of Training, "Involve, Promote, Tailor: How to put the Meaning Back into Training Programs," I talked about the importance of conducting your due diligence and looking at the training objectives through the eyes of your participants, and considering whether it was worth their time to attend.

The participants are our main focus, and whatever we can do as corporate trainers to keep that focus, helps you create and deliver meaningful and memorable training programs. So it has to start with you no matter what role you play in the training department. You need to know yourself first and appreciate not all of your participants learn or respond the way you do. To get a better sense for this, let's get back to basics through a few tried-and-true examples I use in my recently published book, "Oops! I'm The Manager! Getting Past 'What Do I Do Now?!' in 5 Easy Steps," in which I introduce you to the "Playground Personalities" and take you back to the playground, where it all began.

Do you remember what kind of kid you were on the playground? Were you the one who made sure everyone got a turn at bat (Peacemaker)? The one who made everyone lined up and counted off by twos (Organizer)? The one who changed the rules in the middle of the game (Revolutionary)? Or the one who wanted to play it your way (Steamroller)?

Now, match your answer to the descriptions below to find out which Playground Personality you were (and still are):

Peacemaker: You appreciate communication and collaboration. You care about others and want to be sure everyone is happy. You're loyal and have high integrity. Establishing relationships and building trust are important to you. You want to be happy at work and want others to get along.

Organizer: You are highly structured and decisive. You love schedules, timelines, systems, and traditions. You plan timelines and need to know which responsibilities are assigned to whom. You anticipate pitfalls, and always have a backup plan ready. Your mantra is usually "everything has a place." Lists help you lead your life.

Revolutionary: You hate routines and schedules and prefer to adapt to the moment at hand. If you're a Revolutionary, you'd rather take your chances with a flexible atmosphere than let policies and procedures get in the way. You like to work in a freeing environment where you can think, create, get things done, and have fun doing it.

Steamroller: You are smart, highly opinionated, a great visionary, and can solve complex problems. You don't suffer fools gladly, and you like to surround yourself with competent people. Steamrollers constantly need to be intellectually stimulated, as you get bored easily. Your mind always is on because you don't have an "off" switch.

Once you figure out your Playground Personality, you need to be able to recognize these Playground Personalities in others. In the case of training, that means your learners. So whether you are writing curriculum, or delivering traditional classroom training, it is important to be able to assess your participants. Yes, it would be nice if each participant had their Playground Personality branded on their foreheads, but that's not possible, so you have to work hard at figuring out who's who.

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Here are three secrets to figuring out who's who in your classroom playground:

Secret 1: Know yourself first, what motivates you, what inspires you, what makes you tick, and what frustrates you. Before you can change the way you train people, you have to recognize your personality. The truth is being self-aware will help you in any life situation. It's being able to own up to who you are and realizing that changing who you are to elicit responses and behaviors from others may work in your favor!

Secret 2: Qualify the audience while writing the curriculum by putting yourself in the Playground Personalities of the participants. If you know the organization or department culture, then it's easy to address the needs of the participants. But if you don't know, ask the department head, or try to make some deductions based on the industry or trade the participants work in, but don't pigeon-hole, make assumptions, or stereotype participants. That could be dangerous. Instead, before the curriculum is complete, you'll need to have an equal balance of content, activities, and question-and-answer time to satisfy all of the participants and their Playground Personalities.

For example:

- Allow for time to share at table groups. (Peacemaker)
- Create checklists and useful handouts for future reference. (Organizer)
- Focus on exercises that are fun and interactive to get people up and moving. (Revolutionary)
- Provide a full explanation of the history, meaning, and purpose of the curriculum. (Steamroller)

Secret 3: Hopefully you'll get to debrief with the curriculum writer so you can understand the content and flow of the training, but if you don't have the opportunity, or if you wrote the curriculum, you may have to assess your participants early in the training. Knowing upfront what will keep the interest of participants is extremely helpful. While it sounds complicated, it's not. You'll have to practice until you get good at it, but it's a skill you will use both inside and outside the classroom.

It's all in your listening skills and your observation of the non-verbal cues of the participants. I'm going to leave the observation of the non-verbal cues to you and focus on the listening skills. Create a warm-up based on everyday life that will elicit words and actions. Don't make the warm-up so complicated and intricate that you spend more time explaining it to participants than listening and observing their responses.

Try this warm-up to sharpen your listening skills. Ask participants how they do their grocery shopping? Possible answers:

- "I ask my family what they would like, what's missing from the pantry, or what their favorite brand of ice cream is." (Peacemaker)
- "Before I leave for the grocery store, I make a list of groceries by category that I need to buy, i.e., produce, meats, vegetables, snacks, and beverages. Then I put a bullet under each category of items I need. At the store I shop row by row, pick up the items, and check them off my list." (Organizer)
- "I don't like to go grocery shopping, so I don't go, I send my kids." (Revolutionary)
- "I don't grocery shop." (Steamroller)

You'll be amazed at how much information you'll get from your participants that will give you the data you need to make training delivery changes on your feet. Make no mistake, being a corporate trainer is hard work, especially these days when budgets are being cut and training programs are always getting challenged. Making your participants happy, and giving them the necessary skills and resources to be productive in today's workplace, couldn't be more important. So be impactful and have fun with it. Good luck!

Katharine Giacalone is President of KGWorks, a management consulting firm based in the Washington, DC area, and author of the new book, "Oops! I'm The Manager! Getting Past 'What Do I Do Now?!' in 5 Easy Steps."