

What makes a “good” trainer?

Facilitating a session for a group of fellow conservationists/conservation champions to discuss the principles of conservation can be challenging, or even intimidating. While none can claim expertise on a subject as complicated as conservation, facilitating such a session can be a very fruitful exercise for the participants and the facilitator(s).

Facilitating a session is not easy, but can one learn with experience? Yes, the research suggests so (Leach, 1996).

Several studies have been carried out to evaluate what makes a trainer effective. Here we have compiled a list of characteristics, identified from these studies, which make a trainer exemplary (Anon., n.d.; Leach, 1996; Gauld & Miller, 2004).

Enthusiasm/High Energy: A good trainer is able to intentionally create an up-beat climate for the participants. The most important aspect for them is their overall ability to prepare for the training. They place great emphasis on having thorough knowledge of the training content prior to conducting the training. They do so by committing time to educating themselves to become fully competent to deliver a training program. Many good trainers claim that they became experts on the content of their training while working on the training. What sets a good trainer apart though is their genuine enthusiasm to conduct the training.

Good communication skills: The essence of a good trainer’s job is to get information across to others in a way that helps them learn. A good trainer is able to convey information clearly and concisely – and they know how to listen. They know when to speak, and when to remain silent, how to encourage others to speak, and how to end a discussion. They know when and how to ask questions. Remember communication skills can be learned and improved.

Sincerity/Honesty: A good trainer is able to demonstrate their true interest in delivering the training to the best of their ability. They see the importance of establishing a clear sense of direction during training to reduce participant anxiety. They also take every participant question seriously. They never pretend to have answers to questions when they do not and provide honest feedback when asked for.

Flexibility: Regardless of the amount of preparation prior to a training event, there may be occasions that call for some adjustments. A good trainer adapts to such situations by recognising the need to adjust, alter, or eliminate material during the training, based on the unique needs of the participants. A good trainer can instantaneously adjust the content of instruction to accommodate participants' unique needs. They may diverge from prescribed material, alter or eliminate less pertinent material, and explore new areas outside the outlined course material based on their level of comfort on the topic. Good trainers are less likely to be concerned with losing control of the classroom training. Instead they stimulate a pertinent discussion and determine the appropriate time to revert to the outlined course material. Pertinent discussion is seen by good trainers to exemplify a successful training event.

Responsiveness: A good trainer demonstrates their responsiveness by expressing interest in the individual learner, by listening, by accommodating individual differences, by establishing a rapport with participants, and by using relaxed mannerism during the training. Becoming involved with the participants is an important reason for their success at training. A good trainer is receptive to comments and questions and is eager to promote and generate a pertinent discussion. Such trainers will choose to discuss pertinent questions based on the dynamics of the group to which they are presenting. They know when and how to appropriately end a discussion. An average trainer on the other hand takes a mechanistic approach to instruction with emphasis placed on, and an apparent sense of pride in, accomplishing the instructional task at hand despite constraints such as limited amount of time and different backgrounds and characteristics of students.

Tolerance: A good trainer sees it as important to maintain a positive attitude and tolerate disruptions during training. They are unlikely to become angry or frustrated during training and therefore lose composure during the training event. A good trainer does not take participant criticism as a personal attack. Such a trainer is willing and able to accommodate different learning styles.

Humour: Good trainers claim to have a sense of humour! They try to make the training fun for participants. Such trainers may poke fun at themselves during training. They also look to incorporate humour in conjunction with personal, real life stories and examples during training to relax the participants and create an open environment.

A good trainer has a set of competencies that they develop with experience which contribute to their success (Leach, 1996). The following table lists some such competencies while also trying to suggest how we could build them ourselves as we set of as trainers:

Competencies of a “good” trainer/facilitator	How can we ensure this?
Sets goals and objectives for training	<p>The goal of our session(s) is to discuss the principles of engaging local communities in conservation. We will also introduce participants to the PARTNERS principles which are a set of guiding principles that can be helpful while working with local communities on conservation.</p> <p>Ensure that you discuss the goal(s) of the session with participants at the outset.</p>
Develops lesson plans	<p>A guide for trainers facilitating the session is available as part of the trainers toolkit. Ensure that you read through the guide and make yourself comfortable with it.</p> <p>If you have any doubts or need clarifications, feel free to reach out to any of the other facilitators.</p>
Keeps current and up-to-date	<p>The module has been designed around a core set of principles. However, the mode of instruction may need to change considering the context and circumstance of the participants. The module encourages trainers to have the flexibility to adapt to such requirements, while continuing to guide them through the process.</p>
Conducts needs assessment	<p>It is useful to understand from the participants what they expect out of the session. In addition we also conduct a formal assessment at the end of each session to gather feedback of the participants.</p> <p>Both of these shall be used to keep the session current and relevant.</p>
Designs instruction so it is easily understood	<p>In our module, we discuss the principles of conservation through experiences sharing by participants. It may be very helpful to ensure that all the participants understand the context and remain part of the conversation.</p>
Provides positive reinforcement	<p>The session is an opportunity for participants to open up with their experiences in conservation – good or bad. Encourage them to share without judging them.</p>
Blends different training techniques	<p>We try to use group activities and other methods through the module to make the module fun and interactive. But it always helps when you think through each of these and how you’d conduct for the group you are going to engage.</p>

Competencies of a “good” trainer/facilitator	How can we ensure this?
Uses questioning to involve participants	<p>The session is only as good as the participation we are able to achieve. Use every opportunity to bring the participants to speak, share experiences and present their views. Without participation, the session could become very boring.</p> <p>Plan before the start of the session on how you will engage the participants and encourage them to speak actively.</p>
Facilitates group learning activities	<p>The module has eight group activities that have been built in to ensure participation within the group. This was done based on feedback from the initial set of participants who have taken part in these workshops.</p> <p>If you see the opportunity to include more group activities that are relevant and could improve the module from its current form do reach out to your co facilitators so that it can be made part of the guide for trainers.</p>
Clearly explains concepts	<p>Acquaint yourself with the general principles of engaging communities in conservation – a helpful list of resources on the topic is available as part of the toolkit. Make sure you are comfortable with them. Discuss them with other facilitators if required.</p> <p>Use your perspective when facilitating these session. It is possible that participants may come with differing views which provides us the opportunity to engage on the topic. We hope that through such opportunities, we will come back with a richer perspective on the topic which can benefit all.</p>
Presents training in a logical sequence	<p>The module has been designed in a manner that begins from some of the basic principles and we continue to logically build on them.</p>
Recognizes and attends to individual differences	<p>Participants may include people with different perspectives and views. It is important to acknowledge this while trying to guide the discussion on the principles of engaging communities in conservation.</p>
Explains complex ideas so they can be easily understood	<p>In case there are concepts or ideas that are hard to explain, do encourage others to contribute – part of the objective is for the entire group to explore the subject through sharing.</p>
Evaluates effects and impact of training	<p>The module will be followed by an evaluation that will be administered by the trainer. The feedback from the evaluation will be used to build on the module to make it more effective.</p>



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This document has been developed by summarizing findings from the following books and articles. Readers interested in obtaining more details should read these. Some of these have been provided as resources for in the training kit provided to participants.

ANON. (undated) What Makes a “Good” Trainer? *Human Capital Review*.

GAULD, D. & MILLER, P. (2004) The qualifications and competencies held by effective workplace trainers. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 28, 8–22.

LEACH, J.A. (1996) Distinguishing Characteristics Among Exemplary Trainers in Business and Industry. *Journal of Career and Technical Education*, 12.