

IMPROVING CLASSROOM TRAINING THROUGH FACILITATION

EXECUTIVE PLANNING

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ABSTRACT

Traditional instructional methodology using lecture, visual aids and so forth may not be the most effective for instructing adult learners. Fire officers who instruct classes usually don't have formal training as teachers and often fail to make the materials interesting enough for adults. The problem is that classes instructed by fire officers are not well received by fire personnel which leads to diminished training results and wastes time.

The purpose of this research was to find more effective instruction techniques that could be used by fire officers. The following research questions were answered:

1. Is there a need for a different instructional methodology for in-house training at Spokane Valley Fire Department?
2. Is there significant difference between teaching adults and teaching youthful learners?
3. What are the most effective techniques for instructing fire personnel at Spokane Valley Fire Department?
4. Can nonprofessional educators (fire officers) effectively use new methodology to instruct classes?

The procedures used included surveying personnel to identify attitudes toward training, a literature review focusing on adult education methodology and facilitation techniques from 1980 to 1998, and comparing actual classes taught traditionally against facilitated discussions. The research found dissatisfaction with classroom training largely directed toward lay instructors. There was considerable evidence that facilitation as a teaching methodology was more acceptable to adults. With proper training and practice, that technique could be used by fire service instructors to improve training outcomes.

It is recommended that this department hire professional facilitators to train and evaluate officers instructing classes until sufficient experience has been gained. The expense of this instructor training should be returned in the form of better trained personnel and improved morale.

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INTRODUCTION

For decades the fire service has been supplementing functional “hands-on” training with additional training in the classroom setting. This classroom training presented in the traditional way of lecture, visual aids, and so forth may not be the most effective methodology for instructing adult learners. In most cases, training classes have been instructed by fire officers who have at least a good working knowledge of the subject matter, but who are not professional teachers. In many cases they have not had the ability to capture their audience or to make the materials interesting enough for adult learners.

The problem is that classes instructed by fire officers are not well received by adult fire personnel which leads to diminished training results and an ineffective use of precious time.

As the fire service has become more sophisticated and more technical, we have explored new and better methods of training on the drill ground such as “coaching” (see Firehouse / Jan. 1993) and “training in context” (see Fire Chief / Mar. 1998), but we have given little or no attention to updating the methods used in the classroom.

The purpose of this research was to find more effective instruction techniques for fire officers who are instructing adult personnel and to determine how those techniques could be utilized by Spokane Valley Fire Department. Historical research was used to identify trends in adult education from 1980 to 1998. This was supplemented by descriptive and evaluative research to assess employee satisfaction with current training classes and to evaluate the effectiveness of using facilitation instead of lecture methodology. The following research questions were answered:

1. Is there a need for different instructional methodology for in-house training classes at Spokane Valley Fire Department?

2. Is there a significant difference between teaching adults and teaching youthful learners?
3. What are the most effective techniques for instructing fire personnel at Spokane Valley Fire Department in the classroom?
4. Can nonprofessional educators (fire officers) effectively use new methodology to instruct classes?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Spokane Valley Fire Department (SVFD) is a fully paid department with 134 total personnel serving a primarily suburban fire district that includes some heavy industry as well as some rural area. Forty years ago the training program consisted of a newly-hired employee riding along with a veteran for one day and then being assigned to an apparatus by himself. There was no actual training officer or training program. (Jim Keeling, retired battalion chief, personal communication, June 1, 1998). As the community and the department grew, the staffing improved and the training became more extensive. Twenty-five years ago, new recruits were put through a five-week academy taught by various company officers. The training program for recruits as well as ongoing training for all personnel was controlled by the training officer, who was the junior battalion chief. This was not always someone who was actually interested in training, but was a required step to advance to the position of line battalion chief.

During the last twenty-five years, as the fire service took on more responsibilities, like EMS, hazardous materials response, technical rescue, and so on, a need for both ongoing and specialized training was recognized. Officers were sent to outside training and seminars, with the expectation that

the training would be brought back and passed on the rest of the department personnel. However, the training did not tend to trickle down to the rest of the department. The officers who were trained were not always capable teachers and classes were not scheduled to pass the information along. Sending a significant number of personnel directly to outside training classes proved cost prohibitive. Another approach that was tried was to send officers to classes in instruction methodology. This also proved ineffective because the classes offered were sporadic and it was left up to the individual officers to track their own progression of curriculums. An individual lieutenant might take classes one, two, and six in a series of eight.

In 1993, the department finally recognized the need to have training headed by someone who was actually motivated and dedicated to training and created a new position of division chief of training, assisted by a training officer. This approach has been effective, and the training program has blossomed. In 1998, recruits went to a regional training academy that took thirteen weeks and an annual training calendar has been established, which fills the year with training and classes for the other personnel. The classes are generally instructed by department officers of various ranks, and individuals who miss a class are required to complete a make-up assignment.

State and federal training requirements have been continually adding classes to the annual calendar to the point of creating a perception that there is no longer enough time in the day to complete all the required training. This perception has been compounded by increases in alarms and other duties, such as company inspections, brought about by a growing population, as well as the department providing additional services. While personal observation indicates that there is still a significant amount of unstructured time in the work day, even for the busiest companies, there has been growing unrest

directed toward the amount of time spent on training classes. This was brought to the attention of the administration by becoming a recurring complaint presented in labor/management meetings and labor negotiations. The issue involves the entire fire department, as even the chief officers have been assigned a certain amount of required training by consensus of the administrative staff.

The effect of the perceived problem has been an impact on morale, and has led to poor labor/management relations. There has been a growing reluctance to participate in training, and the classes are becoming less and less effective, as some personnel only go through the motions and participate minimally. If this problem is not resolved, the department can expect continued labor/management problems, and the progress made in the training program will gradually erode away. However, if the problem is addressed in future planning and is resolved, we should be able to expect an improvement in training outcomes, improved morale, and better labor/management relations.

The prognosis for finding a solution is good. In a seeming contradiction, even while complaining about the training requirements, the personnel freely state that the training level is the best it has ever been and they feel that the training division is doing a good job. The problem, then, seems to be in the class content or delivery. The solution being explored by this paper is the identification of a more effective training methodology for the instruction of fire personnel. This research relates directly to module two of the Executive Planning course at the National Fire Academy, which deals with project leadership. The scope and substance of this research also comprise an element of strategic planning in that facilitating teamwork is an integral part of such planning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this project involved the examination of literature pertaining to adult education methodology, student centered learning, and facilitating techniques. The research focused on alternative training techniques that could be used by lay instructors in the fire service.

Educators first suggested that adults, as learners, might be different from children in the 1920's. There were various movements to address this concept, starting with group discussion in the 1930's. The 1940's brought extensive use of audio-visual aids and presentations, largely influenced by the military training needs of World War II. The 1950's saw the inception of human relations training, programmed instruction, and community development techniques. Some ideas that came out in the 1960's are still familiar to us today, including change theory and organizational development, management by objectives, systems theory, and others. In the 1970's we saw the introduction of computer-assisted instruction, competency-based education, behavior modification, self-directed learning, contract learning, and more. None of those concepts were really adopted by main stream educators, however, and adult education continued to follow the familiar model of pedagogy. The 1980's brought refinement and combinations of the previous methodologies enhanced by interactive television, computer-based learning, mentorships, motivational techniques, nominal group techniques, and distance learning strategies. Adult education was finally getting some serious attention from academia as a separate discipline.

According to Cross, (1981) Malcolm S. Knowles was the first to give adult education a separate name in this country (p.222). He introduced his theory of "andragogy" in the late 1970's, which he defined as the art or science of teaching adults. Knowles touted breaking away from the standard

instructional methodology when the learners are adults. “In a world of accelerating change learning must be a lifelong process. Therefore, schooling must be concerned with developing the skills of inquiry, and adult education must be primarily concerned with providing the resources and support for self-directed inquiries.” (Knowles, 1980, p.19). Knowles said that adults learn naturally when not being taught.

They seek to learn new things and usually seek out helpers who have not been trained as teachers.

“Frequently when they go to teachers, the teachers interfere with their learning by substituting their own pedagogical sequence of steps rather than flowing with the learners’ natural sequence.” (p.42).

Knowles’ theory was based on four basic assumptions about adult learners that distinguish them from children. They can be summarized as follows:

1. Self-Concept. Adults have a deep psychological need to be self-directing. They resent and resist situations that do not allow for self-direction.

2. Experience. Adults have accumulated a reservoir of experience that serves as a resource for learning.

3. Readiness to learn. Adults become ready to learn things that they need to know to fulfill their roll in society.

4. Orientation to learning. Adults have a problem-centered orientation to learning as opposed to a subject-centered orientation.

Lee, (1998) noted that in 1984 Knowles added a fifth assumption; Adults are more motivated to learn by internal factors, such as increased self-esteem, than they are by external rewards like pay raises and promotions (p.50). Building on those assumptions, much of the literature supported the theory that teaching adults does need to be approached differently because adults are self-directed learners.

“Adults need more flexible, participative, experience-based, problem-centered training.” (Feuer & Geber, 1988, p.1).

Others have followed in Knowles’ footsteps and have also identified characteristics of adult learners that may affect the appropriate methodology for instructing adults. Traditionally, adults have generally approached learning as volunteers. “They learn whatever they want to learn without faculty committees’ determining whether or not it meets externally imposed standards, and there are no grades or examinations to serve as rewards or punishments.” (Cross, 1981, p.228).

Several studies (Justice, 1997; Kasworm, 1994; Knowles, 1980; Lee, 1998) emphasized the importance of considering the effect of adults’ life experience. While much of the information in the literature that was directed toward adults could also be applied equally to youthful learners, it may be more critical for the instructor to consider when the learners have life experience. For instance, Kasworm pointed out that adults valued a well-designed course, knowledgeable instructors who were committed to the training, and supportive classroom relationships, along with the opportunity for personal interaction with the faculty (p.145). Kasworm also reported, “Most adults valued faculty who purposefully created class participation and used other varied teaching/learning strategies.” (Kasworm, p.146). Certainly all these values would be shared by youth, but as Justice (1997) pointed out, the adult learners come to their education with more experiences and with a greater sense of themselves. Kasworm also addressed this point when she wrote, “Thus, academic outcomes are influenced by both the internal campus environment, but more broadly by the wealth of past and current adult commitments, involvements, and related experiences that influence learning and action in the world.” (p. 199). The effect of this influence shows up in the classroom by the attentiveness, or lack thereof, of the

student. “To gain the attention of adult learners is one thing; to hold it is quite another.” (Galbraith, 1990, p.98). The literature shows that adults are less likely to tolerate instructors that do not meet their expectations.

“Adults vote with their feet,” a favorite adage of adult educators, is frequently used to describe a characteristic of adult learners. In most circumstances, adults are not captive learners and, if the learning situation does not suit their needs and interests, they will simply stop coming. (Imel, 1994, p.3).

Another important factor in assessing any differences between adult and youthful learners is the motivation of the student to learn. Knowles, (1980) believed that people become ready to learn something when they experience a need to learn it in order to better cope with real-life tasks or problems. (p. 44). Coupled with that connection to life, adults often are motivated by more than just a desire for more knowledge. “[Adults] have a strong need to apply what they have learned” (Galbraith, 1990, p.99). Flannery, (1997) listed a number of reasons that motivate adults to learn, including gaining knowledge, improving self-esteem, gaining financial reward, and advancing in their careers. (P.22).

Some of the literature also presented the opposing point of view that adults do not pose a significant challenge to standard instructional methodology. For instance, Feuer & Geber, (1988) posed the question: Do adult educators employ andragogical techniques because adults really *are* self-directed learners, or do they use these methods because they believe adults *should be* self-directed learners? (p. 1). This view of the theory of andragogy being based on erroneous suppositions supports instructing everybody in the same traditional manner. Another slant on the differences was that of ability to learn. Galbraith (1990) presented the two conflicting views of adult learners as being fairly

widespread. He put it as follows:

The first is held by Main Street Americans; it represents adult learners as less capable than young learners. It's essence is captured by the proverb 'you can't teach an old dog new tricks'. The second is held by many professional educators of adults; it represents adult learners as super learners. (p. 23).

A third concept opposing andragogy was more academic and challenged the concept being a legitimate theory. "It is presumptuous to talk ... about theory building; like most fields of educational research, we are very far from ready for that advanced activity." (Cross, 1981, p.220). While there was some criticism of andragogy as a theory and of its best application, nearly all of the literature supported the idea that adults deserved, if not demanded, special considerations as learners. The biggest concern by those authors who opposed andragogy as a method of teaching adults was not that the methodology was flawed, but that it should not single out adults. "Kids have just as much need for learning to be life-centered, task-centered and problem-centered. It's just that the nature of their tasks, problems and lives is different." (Feuer & Geber, 1988, p.1)

The literature also made it clear that the subject matter is an important factor in considering the best methodology, regardless of the age of the learners. Student centered learning is not necessarily the best approach in all classes. Knowles, (1980) in comparing his new theory with pedagogy noted that neither model would work best all the time for any age of learners. He suggested that one should first determine if the learner is self-directed in the particular endeavor at hand and then apply the appropriate model. (p. 43). Galbraith, (1990) wrote, "There is no one model of discussion leadership suitable for all groups or all curricula." (p. 196). As Imel (1995) put it, "Should teaching adults be different? The

answer to that would, of course, depend upon the purpose of the teaching-learning situation, including what approach and methods seem to be appropriate, as well as the needs of the learners.” (p.4).

Many of the authors emphasized the learning environment as being of significance to the adult learner. The point was made that providing proper support for the adult learner involved providing a learning environment that meets both physical and psychological needs, (Imel, 1994; Knowles, 1980; Lee, 1998). Knowles explained that the physical environment should be comfortable and informal and at the same time adults should feel accepted, respected, and supported.

As to the physical needs, Galbraith (1990) suggested that the room should be organized with five or six chairs to a table to provide good eye contact with all participants. He also stated, “Opinions differ as to the optimal size for interaction, but the consensus seems to be that somewhere between ten and twenty members offers the best chance for provocative discussion.” (p. 194). Another physical aspect that should be considered is the potential for distractions. It is important to keep the room safe from interruptions and distractions (Galbraith, 1990).

Psychologically, developing an atmosphere in which adults feel both safe and challenged should be the goal. “Any anxiety learners might have about appearing foolish or exposing themselves to failure should be eased, but they should not feel so safe that they do not question their current assumptions or are not challenged in other ways.” (Imel, 1994, p.3). Barr (1996) expanded on that concept. She said, “It is necessary to break down competition and focus on collaboration, ‘to create an atmosphere that honor the spirit of inquiry. People will take the route of safety. They won’t experiment if they don’t feel safe.’” (p. 190). Kasworm’s research in 1994 found that adult students had specific beliefs about the classroom environment. “They believed in active involvement through committed attentive presence in

the classroom and an active cognitive interaction with course ideas.” (p. 145-6).

Some of the literature presented quite impressive qualifications and requirements for instructors using this methodology. Hartin (1998), wrote, “Effective facilitation ... is considerably more challenging than delivering a lecture and, in part, requires a different set of skills and abilities.” (p.98). Overall, however, it was clearly expressed that the lay instructor could learn and use this technique very effectively. Galbraith (1990) presented the necessary characteristics of an adult educator as possessing knowledge of the content, the learners, and the methods (p. 4). “Facilitation skills are neither soft nor intangible, and outstanding facilitators are trained, not born.” (Burns, 1995, p.51).

SUMMARY: Review of the literature provided evidence that educating adults is significantly different enough to deserve attention by fire service instructors. The literature promoted the importance of being aware of motives to learn, adult attitudes toward learning, and adults’ natural desire to be included in the process; then adjusting instructional methodology accordingly. Facilitating learning has been promoted as the best overall methodology when working with adults, content permitting. This provides more learner involvement and fosters more interest by adult learners. Facilitation techniques will take training and practice, but they are not so complicated that they can’t be used effectively by lay instructors such as fire officers.

PROCEDURES

First, descriptive research methodology was used to properly identify the source of the dissatisfaction with training classes given at SVFD. An employee survey was prepared and distributed to all suppression personnel at SVFD except training personnel and chief officers. The survey was designed primarily to identify the current employees’ attitudes toward training classes in the classroom

as well as on the drill ground. Of the one hundred and twenty-two surveys distributed, seventy-eight were returned.

Instrumentation

The goal for the survey was to answer research question #1.

Question #1 asked for respondents to rate the number of hands-on drills given in a calendar year as; a) too few, b) about right, or c) too many.

Question #2 asked for respondents to rate the amount of classroom training in a calendar year as; a) too few, b) about right, or c) too many.

Question #3 asked if the drills presented by our training division were; a) very effective, b) adequate to meet our needs, or c) not worth the time spent.

Question #4 asked if the classes instructed by our personnel were; a) very effective training, b) adequate to meet our needs, or c) not worth the time spent.

Question #5 was open ended and asked how training or classes could be improved.

Question #6 asked for comments.

All returned surveys were tabulated and analyzed. A copy of the survey is displayed in appendix A.

Limitations and assumptions

1. It is assumed that the individuals responded to the survey honestly and were not significantly influenced by informal peer groups.

2. The number of surveys returned was not quite high enough to assure an optimum 95%

confidence level, but was felt to be sufficiently high for the purpose of this study.

Historical research methodology was also used in the form of a review of literature on adult education methodology, student centered learning, and facilitation techniques. This research was used to determine if there were alternative instruction techniques that could be used effectively by fire service instructors and if instructional methodology for teaching adults was significantly different. This historical research was directed at research questions #2, #3, and #4. First a literature review was conducted at the Learning Resource Center at the National Emergency Training Center in April of 1998. Following that, a search was made using the Spokane Public Library in Spokane, Washington, the Seattle Public Library in Seattle, Washington, and the library at Gonzaga University in Spokane. Computerized data retrieval systems were searched for books, periodicals, and research papers located at these libraries, as well as those available over the Internet. The search concentrated on trends in training and instructional methodology from 1980 through 1998. Several publications were identified as having relevance, and those publications were reviewed and summarized for inclusion in the literature review section of this paper.

Finally, evaluative research methodology was used to evaluate the effectiveness of facilitation in place of lecturing, as identified by the prior research and also to address research question #4. This evaluative research was in the form of first presenting classes to three groups of personnel at SVFD using a typical lesson plan and following standard instructional methodology. These classes were on enhancing customer service by the fire service and were conducted by the author of this paper. Following those classes, an outline was prepared for facilitating a discussion of the same customer service material. Three group discussions with personnel who did not attend the previous classes were

facilitated, also by the author of this paper. At the conclusion of each class or discussion, a questionnaire was presented to each participant which asked for the individual's perspective on the benefits and drawbacks for enhancing the level of customer service of the fire department, as well as asking for suggestions of customer service opportunities for both the department and the individual employee. A copy of the lesson plan, facilitation outline, and the follow-up questionnaire are included in Appendix A.

Limitations

The author of this paper has been recently self-taught in facilitation techniques and prior to the research discussions had no experience as a facilitator. While the discussions were productive, there is no doubt that practice would improve the results.

RESULTS

The research clearly indicated a need for improving the delivery of classroom training at Spokane Valley Fire Department. The employee survey indicated that the hands-on training was well received with 81% of the respondents indicating the number of drills was about right, and 68% indicating the drills were "very effective". Another 22% rated them adequate to meet our needs and only 10% rated them as poor. However, the classroom training was not so well received with 36% of those responding indicating that there were too many classes being given and the other 64% rating them as about right. The most telling response was to the assessment of the quality of those classes. Fifty-five percent rated the classes as not being worth the time spent on them and 33% thought they were adequate. Only 12% of the respondents thought the classes represented "very effective training". The comments provided in

questions 5 and 6 of the survey provided some indication of the nature of the dissatisfaction. As expected, there were some comments that merely amounted to personal attacks on personnel in the training division that could be attributed to personalities, but there were also some comments and suggestions that were repeated often enough to be significant. Those were as follows:

- Use more outside instructors.
- Screen/limit officers selected for instructing classes.
- Don't read to the class.
- Send classes out on video tape instead of presenting them in the classroom.
- Provide instructor training for officers.
- Eliminate classroom training altogether.

These responses provided a clear indication of where the problem lies and also answered research question #1.

Answering question #2, the literature review provided strong evidence that there is a significant difference between teaching adults and teaching youth. "Adults have certain ego needs and a sense of pride and therefore prefer to be self-directed. Activities designed to allow this self-direction are more likely to receive willing acceptance and encourage serious efforts to learn." (Notar, 1994, p.24).

Nearly all of the literature agreed that the most effective method of instructing adults is to facilitate the learning sessions rather than lecture in the traditional manner. The program content should be student-driven and the instructor should guide the discussion rather than present the material as the authority. Barr (1996) described a facilitator as a person who is not a judge, teacher, or even a task leader, but rather an instrument to help people discover themselves (p.188). As instructional

methodology this technique has not been officially recognized or given any name which complicated the research, however once the appropriate groups of terms were identified for research, a significant number of publications were found. In 1980 Knowles called it andragogy. In 1986 Brookfield called it facilitating and in 1993 Carter called it coaching. In 1996 Barr referred to the method as collaboration and in 1997 Flannery used the term “participative learning”. In the review of the literature it became clear that they were all writing about the same basic methodology of instructing a group which could be described as the act of guiding the group process toward an agreed objective. The facilitator guides the process and does not get involved in the content. Hunter, Bailey, & Taylor (1995) wrote, “It doesn’t work to pop in and out of the facilitator’s role, trying to take part in the decision-making as well as facilitating.” (p.91). Further, as Galbraith (1990) said “But for facilitators to enter discussions with preconceived agendas of aims, objectives, or outcomes is to be guilty of an insidious manipulation. It is also to run the very real risk of being perceived by learners as dishonest and inauthentic.” (p. 189). There is no standard model and the facilitator must adapt to the needs of the group and the content.

Short of an actual model, there were a number of guidelines that were a common thread through the publications. “Adult educators should have an understanding of adult learners; provide a climate conducive to learning; provide a contextual setting for the exploration of new skills, ideas, and resolutions; provide a forum for critical reflection; and have the ability to assist adults in the process of learning ‘how to change our perspectives, shift our paradigms, and replacing one way of interpreting the world by another.’” (Galbraith, 1990, p. 6). This method of facilitation answers research question #3. General guidelines for facilitating have been included in appendix B of this paper.

The literature indicated that effective facilitation did not require specialized skills that could not be

learned by lay instructors. Burns (1995) said, “Most people can learn to facilitate well.” (p.46). With a little instruction, the art of facilitating could be learned by any instructors who have reasonably good people skills and the ability to be themselves. It’s really a matter of using your own style. As Galbraith (1990) put it, “One of the most damaging mistakes facilitators can make is leading discussions is to pretend to a personality they don’t possess.” (p.199). The literature did not imply that effective facilitation was easy, but that the skills required could be learned with instruction and practice, thus answering research question #4. Hunter *et al.* (1995) recommended first having experience in group work, if not as a facilitator then as a participant (p.169).

The evaluative research verified the findings noted above. Even though the lesson plan followed for the first three classes included ample time for discussion, the three sessions which were facilitated all provided more discussion and more interest in the topic. Further, the questionnaires filled out after the facilitated discussions provided more suggestions and more imaginative responses than the ones that followed the typical class format. This evaluative research confirmed the analysis of the historical research that the necessary skills can be learned by lay instructors, also answering research question #4.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study were consistent with those found in the literature review. The adult learner brings maturity and life experience to the classroom and generally understands that lifelong learning is a requirement to success in the world today. In many cases adults are more motivated to learn, and are not in the classroom just because it is required of them. When they are there by forced attendance, adults are more likely to attend physically, but not mentally or emotionally. Therefore, with

the understanding that the classes being provided are important if not essential training, it is necessary that classroom training at SVFD be adapted to meet the needs of the adult learner.

The concept of facilitating discussion instead of presenting material as an instructor is foreign to our culture. Most of us are familiar with democratic committee procedures and how to take a majority vote. However, when we want to get a consensus or a collective decision, we often do not know how to proceed. Facilitation skills are designed to do just that, and with little modification they can be used to direct discussions in place of providing lectures. This collective decision-making can take longer than making a simple majority decision, but the end result may actually save time as the whole group buys in to the outcome and therefore the decisions (training) may actually be implemented more quickly. The use of facilitating provides more flexibility which is attractive to the adult learner as well. Fire service classes have often been constructed by professionals and then taught by lay instructors who are given little or no latitude to deviate from the specific lesson plan. When the collective experience or knowledge of the group makes that plan ineffective, the instructor is left with no options. Using facilitation techniques allows the group to determine the direction of the discussion and with proper guidance not only can draw out the information from the “instructor”, but also tap into the collective knowledge of the “students”, which may be considerable.

The literature indicated that this type of instructional methodology will become more popular as time goes on, and “Methods that stress collaborative learning, problem solving, and critical and reflective thinking will increase in importance.” (Galbraith, 1990, p.402). However, it is important to note that there will be no one method that will be right for all situations. Certainly, facilitating discussion, a methodology based largely on group knowledge would be extremely ineffective in a high school

algebra class. Similarly, fire service recruit school may not be a good forum for this method either.

However, with a little training and practice, good facilitating may be much more productive for classes involving experienced fire personnel.

While adapting a lecture to a facilitated discussion may seem totally foreign at first, in many ways it is not unlike handling a major fire or other incident using the Incident Command System where the incident commander in effect facilitates the mitigation of the disaster using the collective knowledge and experience of the group.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Few of us, as adults, either on the job or in our roles as citizens and family members expect to be told what we need to know or where to find the answers as we deal with day to day problems and events. Therefore, we have learned to use our experience, education, and intelligence to function effectively in those capacities. Yet, the training format for classes taught at SVFD to adult personnel continues to utilize the standard instructional methodology that we received as children. This is frustrating for the learners and somewhat ineffective. We have all experienced the phenomenal changes that have occurred in other aspects of the fire service, but with the exception of using computers, we still educate in the same basic way.

Since all the classroom training at SVFD has been determined to be training that is required by the federal or state government, or by department policies, reducing or eliminating the classes is not a viable option. Therefore, the department must find a way to improve the satisfaction with the delivery of those classes. Based on the findings of the research described in this paper, it is recommended that

SVFD train their officers in the techniques of facilitation and use that methodology whenever it is appropriate for the material being presented to adult personnel. This will first involve acquiring or developing a facilitation training program for instructors. Since all of the officers involved have had considerable experience as either an instructor or a student in classroom situations, this would obviously be an excellent opportunity to use the method being described, even while teaching it. The recommended course of action is to use a professional facilitator, first to develop and demonstrate the concept for fire service instructors and then to evaluate and coach them until some experience is gained. As the officers are exposed to more of this methodology, both as instructors and as participants, their proficiency and comfort level will improve.

One drawback to typical facilitation is that it can take up more time. This must be addressed when adapting it to the typical two hour fire service training periods. This can be done effectively, however, by starting with a broad outline of activities and discussion that has been divided into specific time segments and then judiciously keeping to the time frames. Another negative aspect of this recommendation is that it will involve some expense for the services of the professional facilitator as well as the need to schedule additional classes into a training calendar that is already full. However, the expected result will improve not only classroom training, but also morale and labor/management relations which will have a positive impact on nearly all non-emergency functions of the department. An old Chinese proverb says, "If we don't change our direction, we will end up where we are headed." The fire service is famous for continually making the same mistakes associated with our traditions and past practices. It is time to explore a new training paradigm.

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APPENDIX A

**** SURVEY ****

This survey is for the purpose of gathering information to assess the effectiveness of our training programs. Please fill it out and return it to Assistant Chief Lobdell via department mail. It is not necessary to include your name.

1. The number of hands-on drills given in a calendar year by Spokane Valley Fire**Department is:**

- a) Too few _____ b) About right _____ c) Too many

2. The number of classroom training sessions given in a calendar year by Spokane Valley**Fire Department is:**

- a) Too few _____ b) About right _____ c) Too many

3. The drills presented by Spokane Valley Fire Department's Training Division have been:

- a) Very effective training
b) Adequate to meet our needs
c) Not worth the time spent

4. The classes instructed by Spokane Valley Fire Department personnel have been:

- a) Very effective training
b) Adequate to meet our needs
c) Not worth the time spent

5. How could training or classes at Spokane Valley Fire Department be improved?

6. Comments

RESULTS

This survey is for the purpose of gathering information to assess the effectiveness of our training programs. Please fill it out and return it to Assistant Chief Lobdell via department mail. It is not necessary to include your name.

1. The number of hands-on drills given in a calendar year by Spokane Valley Fire

Department is:

a) Too few 6 b) About right 63 c) Too many 9

2. The number of classroom training sessions given in a calendar year by Spokane Valley

Fire Department is:

a) Too few 0 b) About right 50 c) Too many 28

3. The drills presented by Spokane Valley Fire Department's Training Division have been:

a) Very effective training 53

b) Adequate to meet our needs 17

c) Not worth the time spent 8

4. The classes instructed by Spokane Valley Fire Department personnel have been:

a) Very effective training 9

b) Adequate to meet our needs 26

c) Not worth the time spent 43

ENHANCING CUSTOMER SERVICE

POST-CLASS QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What do you see as the benefits of enhancing the level of customer service provided by Spokane Valley Fire Department?
2. What drawbacks or negatives do you foresee in regard to enhancing our customer service?
3. What specific things could be done by the department to improve customer service?
4. What specific things could you personally do to improve customer service?

APPENDIX B

GUIDELINES FOR FACILITATION

There is no standard model for facilitation. Diversity in methods and materials is necessary, and perfection is impossible. However, the following guidelines may be of use:

Maintain enthusiasm - use a positive approach.

Be knowledgeable of the subject - there is no set solution.

Be adaptable - recognize alternative approaches.

Listen attentively to participants - be genuine.

Support efforts of participants - there are no wrong answers.

Keep it interesting - involve as many participants as possible and keep it moving.

Manage the group - prevent anyone from dominating a discussion.

Use active listening - paraphrase for understanding.

Use questions, not statements - draw participation.

Use open ended questions - stimulate thought.

Keep the environment non-threatening - participants must feel safe to participate.

Ask for benefits before barriers - put on a positive spin.

Don't lecture - the instruction is student centered, not instructor centered.

Summarize - provide feedback and paraphrase key points.

Regularly evaluate progress - demonstrate movement toward objectives.

Set time limits and stick to them.

Consensus Building Techniques:

- Agree on items to be eliminated.
- Agree on items to be merged.
- Explore new options with “What If?”.
- If all else fails, offer the opportunity for a minority report.

ENCOURAGE:

- Listening for the whole group.
- Listening for what needs to be said.
- Speaking the unspeakable.
- Recognition of the group wisdom.

AVOID:

- Ignoring the unspoken upset.
- Ignoring the group wisdom.
- Pretending the distress will go away.

Facilitation involves a continual process of activity, reflection of activity, collaborative analysis of activity, new activity, further reflection, further collaborative analysis, and so on. (Stephen Brookfield).