

OUTREACH TRAINER VALUE CHAIN

by Tony Alotto

In the April 16, 2013 *SmartBlog on Leadership*, Stephanie Scotti penned an excellent article on presentations by leaders. As I read that article, it occurred to me that it applied equally well to trainers, especially OSHA Outreach Trainers because of the importance of what we are trying to do.

Ms. Scotti describes three types of presenters: **Expert**, **Interpreter**, and **Catalyst**. I am paraphrasing here, so I recommend that you search out her original article for the full meaning (see Ms. Scotti's article at: <http://smartblogs.com/leadership/2013/04/16/where-is-your-presentation-on-the-value-chain/>).

She describes the “Expert” as the kind of presenter “*who understands in detail the who, what and why.*” They have “*the dreaded curse of knowledge. They frequently share a laundry list of information that makes perfect sense to them but usually has no identifiable structure or context for it to be meaningful to others.*”

As I observe trainers, I see this trait displayed in many ways. The trainer will attempt to cram everything they know about the subject into the time allotted, or put paragraphs of text onto PowerPoint slides, typically reading the text to the trainees. The trainer can honestly say that he or she told them everything they need to know, but trainees may feel overwhelmed or find that they can't distinguish what is truly important to them from a hazard awareness, recognition, and elimination or mitigation standpoint. I see this in the form of trainers who spout OSHA regulations chapter and verse, and who have too many slides, too much material, too much information, and no logical means to separate the “must know” from the “nice to know.” Trainers shouldn't try to impart a lifetime of work experience into an outreach class. The training should be about hazard awareness, recognition, and elimination or mitigation.

While these trainers are hard to fault because they know their material and present all of it, they aren't considered good by their trainees because of the feeling of being overwhelmed by too much information. Do you ever have trainees complain that the class should have been much longer? Perhaps it is because you are trying to present too much.

Ms. Scotti describes the “Interpreter” also as a subject matter expert, but one who is able to “translate information in a way that is meaningful” to the trainee. Information is pared down to what is truly important to the trainee, and related to specific job situations back on the job. The trainer presents the information in a logical order, and presents only what is important. “War stories” are minimized and the trainees understand what the job hazards are, and how they can be recognized, and eliminated or mitigated.

Interpreters are good trainers. I see a large number of this kind of trainer. Interpreters are the kind of trainer we all like to have as our instructors. We feel that we have learned something useful that we can immediately apply to our work life after leaving their classroom.

The last type of trainer Ms. Scotti describes is the “Catalyst.” Like the Expert, they are a subject matter expert, and like the Interpreter they are able to translate the subject matter into useful information for the trainee's use on the job. However, the Catalyst has one additional skill – the ability to inspire. Inspiration creates true change in a trainee by presenting a personal and passionate plea for safety in the workplace. Catalysts engage trainees in the learning process to ensure they are moved into action. This can inspire trainees to initiate a change to a safer working environment for themselves and all those around them.

A huge part of our role as OSHA Outreach Trainers is to inspire people, to get them to go beyond the complacency and macho attitudes and really want to work safely and to want others around them to do the same. Without inspiration, the trainee will fall back to old habits, will take short-cuts, will take chances, and will ignore others who may be working unsafely. With inspiration, workers not only want to work safely, they have a passion for ensuring others work safely as well.

The few really great trainers I have observed were Catalysts. When I left their classroom, I honestly felt a desire to do more to ensure a safe workplace.

(NOTE: This article is adapted from an article by Stephanie Scotti - www.professionallyspeaking.net). Tony Alotto was the OSHA Training Institute Education Center's Outreach Coordinator. This article was originally published in *TEEX Outreach Insider*™ 3-13.