

Fine Content, Bad Delivery

BY JOE URBANSKI

What are trainers
doing wrong?





training participant referring to a course as boring, ineffective, or something that could have been an email wouldn't please any facilitator. Talent development professionals delivering face-to-face or virtual training while sitting in a chair and talking the whole time does not create high energy. It's not the way to interact with an audience. Professional speakers don't sit on stage and talk—they're up and energized, ready to inspire participation.

You know you've experienced it: great training content, but you were bored out of your mind. Why would you do the same thing to colleagues, new hires, or others who choose to come to your session?

It's easy to read the slides and be a presenter, and it's easy to give a speech and think that people are learning. But none of that is education. The Latin root of *education* means "to lead out." If during your course you are seated and simply presenting information, you are not educating. If during an onboarding session you are simply providing information and processes, you are not educating. You're doing it all wrong.

I have keynoted and presented at conferences—as well as attended many—where lecture-style sessions are still the norm. Whether it's instructor-led training, live virtual training, on-the-job training, or just a regular meeting, something has to change.

People ask me all the time: "Joe, what's different now that we're online?" Participants can mute you. That's all. The goal is the same whether we are in person or online: Bring the content to life. Otherwise, write a book and give it out.

Think about the last amazing book that you couldn't put down or a TV series you didn't want to stop watching or a training event that you didn't want to end. Wait, that last one is not a thing. But seriously, you were deeply engaged in that book, TV series, conversation, event, or experience regardless of everything else going on in your world.

We do have to consider what's happening in the world, because everything is different now. Your content is competing

against everything on the internet—all the smartphone apps, games, and social media that can distract participants.

Now think about the best learning experiences you've ever had. What made them so enjoyable, memorable, and actionable? I'm confident that it was never the content.

To create a high-energy, interactive, engaging, and fun experience, we need to change our mindset, approach, and language. The Learn-Say-Do-Reflect (LSDR) model is one way to make your training, webinars, video meetings, and conferences events that participants will want to—not just have to—attend.

Put participants at the forefront

Each part of the model is based on practical application in both in-person and online experiences; with extroverted and introverted participants; and in short, 45-minute sessions and up to three-day retreats. Use the LSDR model to rethink how to approach training while engaging learners. Whether the event is remote and digital or on-site and in person, the framework will enhance training cultures to

generate lasting results, instead of solely conveying information.

The model is based on the participant perspective: They will learn, say, do, and reflect. That is different from the usual presenter-driven framework that focuses on what the facilitator needs to do to build a presentation. That perspective changes everything—and hopefully you agree by now that you are not presenting information but rather engaging participants in a dynamic learning experience.

Step 1: Learn

There are so many ways to help participants, employees, or your kids learn. That's easy. It's also easy to overwhelm people with content, because anyone with a smartphone can be a content provider. However, it's more than being a subject matter expert; we need to shift from being content experts to being context experts.

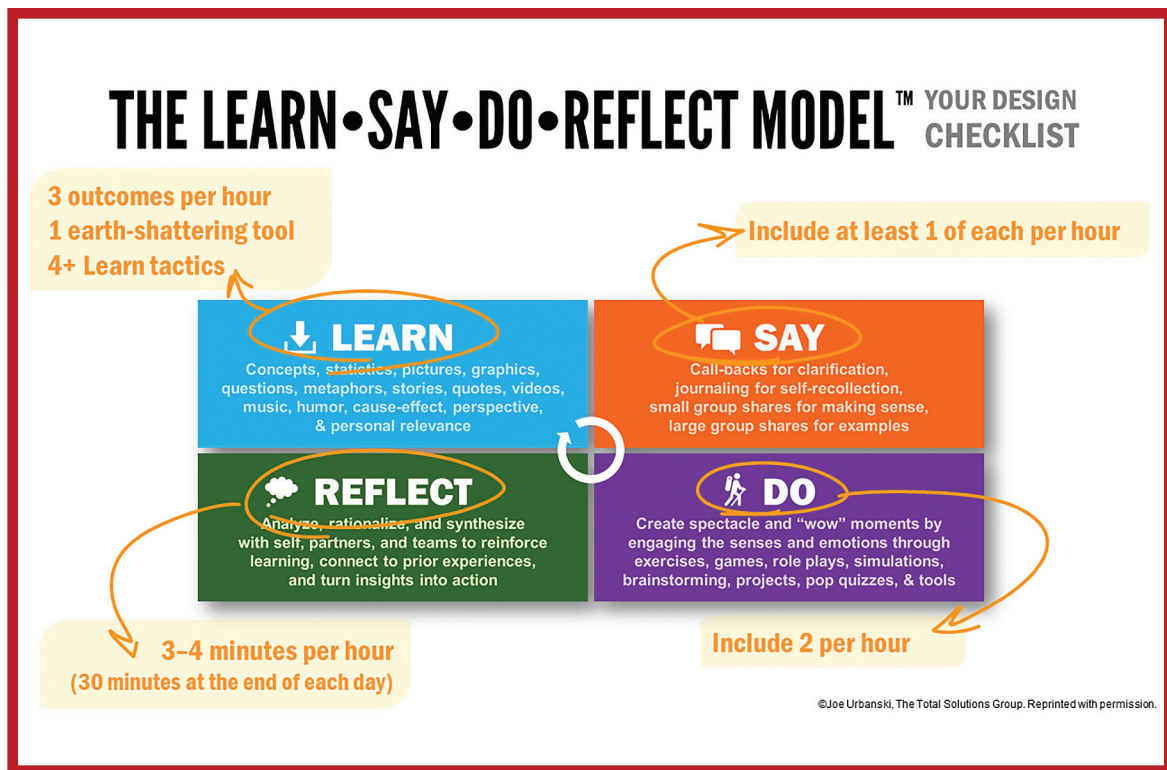
If you saw or heard the headline “Man Attacks Alligator,” how would you respond? Maybe you would be sad, angry, upset, or heartbroken.

Let's add more context: “Man Attacks Alligator Chasing Puppy.” Now maybe he's a hero or you feel relieved or proud. The content didn't change, only the context—the story surrounding the content.

Here's more context: “Man Attacks Alligator Chasing Puppy That Stole Its Lunch Money.” That may elicit a smirk, smile, or chuckle—regardless, it evokes a different feeling with new context.

Context as it relates to our work has to do with:

- Who is learning (do they have experience with the content)
- Where they are learning (in the office, at home, at a convention center)
- When they are learning (during their workday, on a day off, in between meetings, after a funeral, before a wedding)
- Why they are learning (they want to, it's mandatory, they bought tickets, they will be tested)
- How they are learning (visuals, audio, physical interactions, discussions)



Change Your Mindset, Approach, and Language About Digital Events

It's not just a webinar or meeting; it's an experience. You can transform any online session into an event where people experience feelings instead of only thoughts. Put more effort into the context, design, and facilitation.

It's not just a presentation; it's a performance. Don't simply provide a boring lecture with graphs and charts that you think are interesting. Stand up and give your learners the energy they deserve. Do more than just provide information. Get yourself engaged to get everyone else engaged.

It's not just a group of attendees; it's a community. If a seminar is a “meeting for discussion or training,” make certain the lines of communication are open during the entirety of the event. If you create the space for conversation, it will happen. For online experiences, use the chat, breakouts, and the spotlight function to create connections between everyone's insights and actions so they help you co-create the experience.

It's not just your home office; it's your studio. Get the right staging, lighting, and sound equipment to look like a professional.

Step 2: Say

Lectures don't work—they didn't work when you were a child, and they still don't work now. When presenting, make it a conversation where your participants are part of helping each other learn.

Use callbacks for clarification. This is where the learners repeat a word, phrase, or short sentence. It increases their energy, engagement, and memory. If you say it, it's your opinion; if they say it, it's a fact. You may be the SME, and your job is to help them become more expert in the subject matter.

Incorporate journaling for self-recollection. Provide a few moments when participants can write down what they're hearing. Doing so increases their connection to the material as well as their memory. That will help attendees create associations, which is what learning is: associating something you just learned with something you already know.

Use breakouts for small-group shares so attendees can make sense of the material. Empower participants to interact in groups of three to six to teach each other, ask questions, and expand upon what they're hearing.

Use large-group shares for examples with the full audience. Bring volunteers to the stage or spotlight them in a virtual setting to let someone other than you be the star. Participants will be used to you talking and being center stage. A magical thing happens when you give up the spotlight to someone else—everyone else pays attention because one of their own is now the focus. Plus, they may have a better way of explaining something than you do.

Step 3: Do

Now to the fun part: Let the learners do something. For the sake of the learning experience, encourage attendees to interact with the material. What do you think would happen if you were teaching someone how to ride a bike and you never let them get on the bike? Or if you were teaching them a new software and you only talked about it? Or if you were teaching them how to operate an ice cream machine but you didn't have any machines for them to operate? That will 100 percent not work.

Create spectacle and *wow* moments by engaging the senses and emotions. It's easier than you think. I made an etiquette training session entertaining by adding extra forks and knives to a dinner table graphic and challenged the audience to figure out “Whose fork is that?” The answer: their neighbor's, so don't touch it.

Again, it's all about context. Maybe a participant just fielded their worst customer service call; a learner's significant other is in the hospital; an attendee received bad news about a project; or someone dramatically stormed out of the office. Maybe it is March 2020 and you just learned the office will be shutting down. Context changes everything.

Create spectacle and *wow* moments by engaging the senses and emotions.

It's up to you to reset the context and help people be part of co-creating the learning experience. Within the first 10 minutes of every event I facilitate, I start with an energizer and community builder to help everyone reset from wherever they were to where they need to be to engage with the material. After stretching, energizing, connecting, and preparing to engage, people will be ready to learn.

But it doesn't stop there. Participants can experience anything as an exercise, game, role play, simulation, brainstorm, project, pop quiz, or tool. Make the learning fun.

Step 4: Reflect

People need time to reflect. Individuals learn in the silence—in the space between words. That's similar to how you may have

some of your best ideas in silence, on quiet walks, in the shower, right before bed, or during meditation. Give learners that space.

Improving the experience

Those four steps all sound nice, but do they work? Yes. At the Total Solutions Group, we have been providing remote culture-driven solutions for businesses since 2004, and we've been deploying those strategies for creating an energizing participant experience since computers and smartphones had cameras. It's possible, and it all starts by shifting your mindset.

Are you simply presenting information, or is it your most important job to ensure that the people on the receiving end are energized, connected, and engaged with the material—making it worth your time to deliver it and their time to process and then apply it? You decide.

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Making Learning Interesting

In what ways can you add any of the following tactics to help your audience learn the content?

- Concepts
- Statistics
- Pictures
- Graphics
- Questions
- Metaphors
- Stories
- Quotes
- Videos
- Music
- Humor
- Cause and effect
- Perspective
- Personal relevance



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