

SIXTEEN SECRET WEAPONS FOR TRAINERS AND FACILITATORS

Training relies on solid knowledge, good planning, and clear presentation of ideas. However, the best trainers also have a store of Secret Weapons that make the difference between a “Ho-Hum” and a “That was Great!” presentation. Some of those Secret Weapons include:

- **Use body language.** Use gestures and movement to manage the flow of the presentation or shift the group dynamic; for example, raise your hand in the front of the room to capture attention of the group, or stand up from a seated position to indicate a transition.
- **Set the tone.** Everyone’s mood can affect the group, but as the facilitator, yours can make an especially big difference. If you are friendly, warm, and welcoming, participants are more likely to feel relaxed, open, and ready to work together.
- **Be participant-centered.** As the facilitator, make sure you’re primarily helping others share. The conversation should be less you, and more them.
- **Utilize spontaneous energizers.** Know a few quick tried and true activities that can turn up the energy in a room. Whether it’s simply stretching or a quick game of telephone, some light physical activities re-engage and activate a group.
- **Show confidence throughout.** Good presenters are “on” before they walk in the door. You don’t have to be obnoxious, but being friendly and warm even before you begin your presentation helps set the tone. Greet people. Smile.
- **Remember that silence is golden.** Too often presenters feel they have to fill every second with talk. Allow for silence. If you are asking for input or questions, wait a full 30 seconds before moving on.
- **Tell stories.** Stories can illustrate your point and help the audience get to know you a bit. This technique is only effective if it is used sparingly (so that people don’t get sick of hearing about you) and strategically—when the story is the *best* way to convey an idea. Therefore, be sure the story is very brief, totally relevant, and not too personal.
- **Pay attention to back talk.** Use the 30-second rule: If your audience is not talking back to you within the first 30 seconds, you have lost them. Incorporate lots of opportunity for the audience to provide the answers.
- **Engage with people in the room.** Use people’s names when you address them whenever possible; build on what they say throughout the presentation. Refer back to points made by audience members (“This also builds on the point that Lisa made earlier....”). This makes for a responsive and interactive presentation.

- **Set ground rules.** In some groups, it may help to lay out expectations in the beginning, such as: No side conversations. Take breaks whenever needed. No wrong answers. These will help you minimize and manage problem behaviors, and help the group feel comfortable.
- **Use humor.** The power of laughter and playfulness is helpful no matter what the topic, as long as it is genuine. Be yourself, but don't be afraid to incorporate humor.
- **Show humility.** Many audiences view trainers and presenters as experts. Most audiences also respond best to people who seem "down to earth," "real," or approachable. Beware of being preachy, and present your knowledge with humility.
- **Be assertive, but courteous.** Take time to ensure that all voices are heard and that issues and questions are addressed, but keep the meeting on track. Use your role as the facilitator to help the group follow its ground rules and remind them of the meeting's purpose if necessary.
- **Don't be attached to a specific outcome.** As a facilitator you are there to help guide the discussion and lead the group to its own decisions. Ask questions that are open ended and encourage discussion without leading to a specific answer.
- **Record decisions.** Keep track of important decisions or parts of the discussion on a white board or flip chart. This allows people to see what is being accomplished as they go, and also gives them something to refer back to throughout the meeting. If someone is taking notes, they may do this, too.
- **Debrief before you leave.** At the end of the meeting, summarize what was accomplished so that everyone can see what progress you've made. Make sure you discuss next steps and ask who will take them on.