

## BEFORE-TRAINING ACTIVITIES CAN NO LONGER BE AN AFTERTHOUGHT



Considerable time, energy and budget are invested in designing cutting-edge learning. Sophisticated follow-up mechanisms are developed and implemented. Progress is meticulously monitored and results are measured. All the pieces are in place...then too frequently, we blow it. We half-heartedly compose and send off a lackluster “welcome to the class” email, setting the tone for less-than-stellar results.

What happens before the learning event is also an opportunity deserving of attention. And when this happens in a more deliberate way, individuals are able to personalize the experiences to their unique needs and gain considerably more value in the process.

Learning professionals who want to make the most of the precious time leading up to a learning initiative might consider these three key practices.

### MAKE THE INVITATION MEMORABLE

First impressions matter — in relationships and in the way we introduce learning opportunities. A traditional, boring, text-heavy invitation sets a tone. Participants form expectations, about what the training will be like based upon that introduction. So, make sure you’re leaving a first impression that’s memorable and motivating. Have you considered:

Sending a customized 3-D pop-up card that introduces the topic in a visual fashion?

Giving “voice” to your invitation by producing a podcast-style audio introduction?

### PRIME THE LEARNING PUMP

The time between when participants make the decision to engage in learning and when it begins is particularly important. It’s a period that should be mined for as much pre-learning as possible. Presumably a skill or knowledge gap has been identified. A need exists and, as a result, motivation levels may be elevated.

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS ARE LASTING IMPRESSIONS.

Take advantage of this learning limbo by engaging participants with the content. Offer them appetizing opportunities to prepare and immerse themselves in the content. This is not your father’s pre-work — the old-school worksheet packets that frequently felt like a busy work burden. Rather, it’s provocative articles, short videos and teasers that aren’t required, but that are interesting and relevant enough to keep people clicking and mentally preparing for a richer learning experience.

This pre-learning time is also an excellent opportunity to build a sense of community as well as user-generated content. Inviting participants to share resources, articles, tools and perspectives about the topic in advance accomplishes multiple objectives. It supports networking and sends a strong message about the active role they’ll be expected to play in their learning. It informs the facilitator/designer about the current level of awareness and knowledge. And it allows participants to consider the content in advance, elevating the quality of the actual experience.

### INSPIRE INTENTION

How frequently have you started a workshop by asking participants to share their expectations? It’s a great interactive opening, but the problem with expectations like these is that they tend to put the onus on the facilitator to somehow meet them. In contrast, thoughtful personal intention-setting in advance allows participants to take responsibility for and become active partners in their learning.

So, invite participants to consider what they’ll be using and to set intentions, offering questions to ask themselves like:

Where in my life might I be able to use this information?

What problems might I avoid if I get better at this?

If I improved in this area, what results might follow?

First impressions are lasting impressions. When it comes to L&D efforts, what happens (or doesn’t happen) in advance of training dramatically affects everything that follows. So, let’s stop making it an afterthought. Because investing a little creativity and effort before is one of the simplest ways to make the most of your carefully crafted content, design, facilitation and follow up. 

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