

“Meet me in the Hub”

The coming together of General Session and Training Rotations.

Where is it written that general session presentations and training breakouts need to be separate and distinct? There was a time when this plodding, two-pronged approach made sense – when there were few options other than talking heads in the morning and flipcharts in the afternoon. But at today’s pace, with a media-savvy audience, ever-present technology and ever-shortening attention spans, this traditional approach lags behind, ill-equipped for supporting meaningful peer-to-peer engagement, device-driven instruction and the spontaneity inherent in our shared social networking experiences. Now, advances in technology, bolstered by a genuine thirst for change on the part of attendees and facilitators alike, has opened the door to new ways of thinking – to the impending possibilities of a dynamic fusion of the general session and training experiences. And the model for such collaboration may be closer than you think...

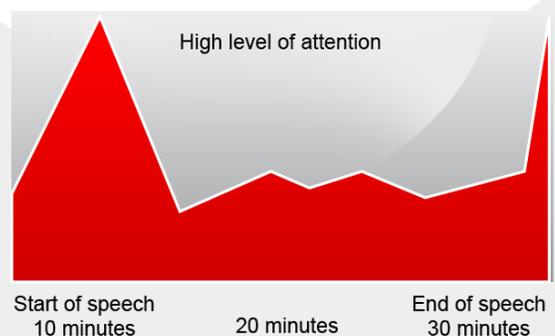


Welcome to the Hub – A single, collaborative environment from which all meeting and training activities extend. Here, attendees find themselves in a vast, fully-branded space, much like a trade show floor, with countless displays and hands-on interactions staggered throughout. Included, are one or more stages hosting presentations for as few as five and as many as 500. It is in this immersive space that attendees, through self-discovery and spirited engagement, absorb the critical messaging that underpins both the training breakouts and the broader general session themes. As the meeting evolves so too does the Hub, facilitating new and different interactions that change with the progression of your message. Throughout the week the Hub is a centerpiece, a meeting place, a memorable place where your team comes together to connect, to share experiences and to see things in new and exciting ways.

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Time for a change – Just as a Hub configuration is designed to break down the traditional infrastructure of a meeting, the complementary time management component calls for scheduling shorter sessions with more frequent movement.

Over the years, customary presentations have suffered the ever-decreasing attention span of audiences.



With respect to speeches specifically, one notable communications firm* charted a significant drop-off in audience attention after as few as five minutes and significant disengagement by ten. With such a narrow window in which to work, trainers, facilitators and presenters need to consider time allocations that embrace this new paradigm and turn a perceived disadvantage into an advantage. (*source: Cynosure)

The resulting “mini-sessions” yield audience engagements of a much more personal nature – with facilitators speaking to smaller groups as they rotate between the various interactions.

Just a theory? Not at all. In recent product launches and sales events, we have successfully implemented the Hub concept and have seen a noticeable uptick in audience enthusiasm and participation. The “buzz” is laudable and contagious as groups assemble and disband – on the move, rotating through presentations and experiences as diverse as the audience itself. This energetic approach not only expands the opportunity to “reach” audience members across the full range of learning styles, but it also affords the presenters themselves the flexibility to communicate their messages, taking full advantage of their unique talents and strengths.

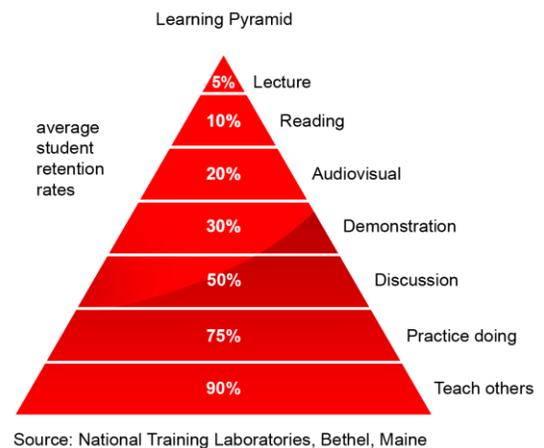
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The promise of this blended approach is made possible, in no small part, by the increasingly available and affordable technology that complements it. Through self-discovery, made highly interactive using iPads, smart phones, RF tags, etc., attendees are not only more receptive to the ideas being presented, but also become genuinely invested in the overall experience.

In fact, the Learning Pyramid seen here illustrates the percentage of learner recall & retention that is associated with various learning approaches. What it reinforces is that the more active the level of participation in the learning process, the higher the retention of learning.

Further still, advances in familiar technologies like tablets and smart devices allow users to quickly embrace the workings of a given workshop and participate more fully.

For trainers and facilitators, more sophisticated apps provide utilization and performance data critical to real time evaluation – allowing for immediate adjustments to courseware and presentations. Here again, the lines are blurred as competition results are announced and/or readily available, employees’ contributions are continually recognized and feedback from the many breakouts is vetted for inclusion in the day’s closing session(s).



The motivation behind the merger – The advantage of merging your general sessions with your training rotations is to capture and maintain the attention of the audience. More collaborative spaces, increased physical movement and truncated presentations combine to keep your team engaged. By lessening the distinctions between breakouts and big tent, the overall message appears more integrated. High-minded theories are merged with grounded realities, connecting tactics to strategy in ways that the audience can both consume and comprehend. And by playing to a shorter attention span, facilitators are compelled to hone their presentations for the greatest possible impact and a more engaging (and therefore memorable) experience for all. In fact, it is again our experience that in meetings where we have employed a blended approach, the related sessions scored among the highest in the metrics of both engagement and retention.

Recognizing the need for new approaches and effectively bringing them about is another matter entirely. Just as high-level messaging must now accommodate training objectives, training strategies must make room for the “Big Picture” perspective. But these challenges and others can be overcome through thoughtful site selection, careful planning and willingness to color outside of the lines.

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