

By Florence Hilliard

## I. Three Keys to becoming a Successful Trainer

### 1. Be enthusiastic about your subject matter and engage the audience right at the beginning of your talk.

Ask yourself, “Why am I willing to talk to people about addiction and recovery?” Once you have that clearly in mind, you’re all set to open up your training.

Example: “Thank you for coming. I am really (excited, happy to be here) (looking forward to spending this time with you) because what I am going to share with you this (morning, evening etc) (explain your reason, some ideas are: has made a difference in my life and recovery, will explain addiction and recovery in a way you might never have thought of before, will clearly explain the need for policy change, etc.)” Whatever you decide to say, make sure it’s genuine. That way, you’ll have your audience “with” you from the start.

**Remember:** Your energy and passion will “speak” to your audience and can help you overcome a lot of early training jitters.

### 2. Be open to improving your presentation.

Like any other skill, to become a great speaker and/or trainer you will need to continually think about what went well and what didn’t each time you do a presentation. You don’t need to apologize if you feel nervous, but **do** ask for and get comments on ways that you can improve your presentation. Take these comments as seriously as compliments on what you did well. Don’t personalize suggestions on how you can improve. Instead, think about those comments as opportunities to help you step outside of your personal comfort zone to get to the level you want to be – a great trainer.

### 3. Do it a lot!

If you’ve ever started a new job, you probably remember how it felt during the learning curve of your first days or months. As time went on you could perform your job with ease and comfort. Training is exactly the same thing. The more you do it – the easier, and more fun, it becomes!

## II. Getting Organized

You will be successful in getting people to hear what you want to say by

- Organizing your talk or training for your audience
- Organizing yourself as a trainer

### Organizing Your Talk

Start with what I call the three W's:

#### 1. Who

Who is your audience going to be? Think about the focus of your talk and how formal you want to be.

*Talk Focus:* What you will want to emphasize in your talk depends on how much time you have and who the audience is. For example, if you are speaking to the teachers at your local school, you will have a different focus than if you are talking to a group of legislators or community leaders.

*Talk Formality:* You'll want to feel comfortable in how you dress, speak and present yourself when you're speaking. Here are some situations you may find yourself in and general guidelines for how formal or informal you should be:

- In-service for staff of single state agency or county board meeting, workshop at a large conference: More Formal
- Legislative luncheon: Very Formal
- Training for group of recovery community friends and acquaintances: Informal
- House party talk: More informal
- Conversations with friends and neighbors who come to you about a family member or friend: Very informal

#### 2. Why

Why are you doing this training or talk to this particular group of people?

Were you invited by them or did you organize the training yourself? To the best of your knowledge, will people be open to this information or might it be a more skeptical audience? These are important things to think about as you decide what you want to focus on and how formal or informal your talk will be.

#### 3. Where

The physical space and mechanics of a room create a positive (or negative) atmosphere for your talk or training.

Physical Space: Believe it or not, when people are forced to sit close together it actually helps the audience be more engaged and interested. I didn't realize this for awhile and couldn't understand why when I gave talks in large rooms where people had lots of space between them, the response wasn't as enthusiastic as I expected sometimes. If your training will be in a large gymnasium or cafeteria for example, plan to get there early enough to set up the seating arrangements so that people are sitting closer together and not spread out, where it's easier for them to be distracted and not engaged in your presentation. And, if the room is large, make sure you have a microphone!

Mechanics: Will people be able to see the slides clearly? Is the room so hot it will make people sleepy? Is there a cord long enough to plug in your laptop or other devices? The mechanics of the space can make a big difference getting off to a good start and in how engaged your audience will be.

## **Organizing Yourself**

### **1. What do I wear?**

You want to feel comfortable and dressed appropriately for each event.

### **2. What do I do with my hands?**

If you haven't done a lot of presenting yet, you may find that your hands seem to "get in the way" and make you feel a bit clumsy or uncomfortable. You can wear something with pockets, hold a piece of chalk or a laser pointer or stand by a podium.

### **3. Can I be heard?**

Don't assume that your voice will carry and that it will be easy for your listeners to hear you. Your voice can get tired and sometimes it's hard to remember to keep your voice level loud enough and without even knowing it, you will lose the attention of people sitting in the back. If your voice tends to be softer, practice using a microphone and ask if there's one available where you'll be speaking. If there isn't a microphone, when you start the training, ask if everyone can hear you at the beginning of the training. And always ask for a volunteer in the back who will raise their hand if you need to speak up during the talk. Sometimes a fan can turn on and you won't even know you're losing the last two rows of your audience!

### **4. What else will I need?**

As you gain experience speaking, you'll figure out what works (and doesn't) for you. Some people prefer to stand behind a podium when they talk, others prefer no podium. Do you like to have a glass or bottle of water handy? How do you like to keep your notes organized and available if you need to refer to them? Ask for what you need – your host wants you to be successful as much as you do.

### 5. What if I don't know the answer to someone's question?

Someone will probably ask you a question about the scientific research that you won't be able to answer. The rule of thumb for this situation is: If the question seems important to helping people attending the training understand that there is a science behind addiction and recovery, answer by saying that you will ask the training director and get back to everyone who's attended the training afterward. Otherwise, respond that while their question is very interesting or important, it's not something that you will be focusing on during this training.

Deleted: understanding

### 6. How can I tell if people are listening?

It's very important that you don't forget to keep track of your audience. Don't get to engrossed in your talk that you forget to really look out at people and gauge your audience. Are eyes drooping, are people not paying attention, are they squirming in their seats? You may need to take an early break, have them stand and stretch, ask for questions or ask if someone can give you an example or story of what you were talking about. Take a few minutes to do something that will make the energy shift from your voice to something else.

Remember to always stick to the time allotted and don't run over, even if there are a lot of questions. If you don't have time to answer all of the questions, announce at the break or thank everyone for coming when the allotted time is up, and invite those who haven't gotten their questions answered to stay.

### 6. What if there's media at the training I'm giving?

Be sure to look over the Faces & Voices of Recovery Tip Sheet for Media Interviews on the Faces & Voices web site at [www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org](http://www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org).

### 7. What if participants challenge what I'm saying?

Your ability to handle people who are oppositional and resisting what you are saying is a skill that will be one of the most important you can learn. It's a skill that can make or break a talk or training. One thing to keep in mind is that oppositional people are not doing something *to you*, they are doing something *for themselves*. They are usually trying to support their own bias or promote their own opinions. There are two strategies you can use to deal with these kinds of situations.

#### A. Acknowledging "Resistance" Before It Happens

A few people may think about the subject matter of this training as "controversial." You can almost be sure there will be a person in your audience who is somewhat skeptical about some of the information that you'll be presenting.

When you come to the slide titled, "Problem with Addiction and Recovery Throughout History," you can acknowledge this "resistance." If you do that, you can avoid getting involved in a verbal debate, and off track from your presentation, later in the training.

## B. Acknowledging “Resistance” or Opposition (direct and indirect) as it Comes Up During the Training

Most people will not openly defy or challenge your presentation directly (although that did happen to me once!). Instead, people may be argumentative or challenge you on small points as you’re going along. That’s fine! The person asking the question may be genuinely confused or just wanting some more information.

Here’s a technique that you can use to “frame” or restate what they’re saying. I try to make my response or statement be positive, if possible. You can answer a question by starting with “I’m glad you asked that”; “that’s an excellent thought/question”; “that’s an interesting question/comment” or a similar statement.

If you’re not sure about what someone is asking or where they’re going with the question or comment, ask them to explain their question first! You can say something like, “Could you say more about that?” When they clarify, they will almost always let you know what they are really asking or commenting about. Then you can decide whether or not it makes sense to go into greater detail about the question.

If you can answer an oppositional question or remark simply, and without defensiveness, then it makes sense to respond. If you feel, however that the question or comment is either too vague, or too oppositional, you’ll want to acknowledge it and say something like, “I’d be happy to talk more with you about this either at break or after the training.” If you do this, you won’t get baited into engaging in a debate in the middle of your talk, getting off track for all of the other people who are there.

### **8. How do I stay passionate?**

Spend a few minutes before your talk (or the night before) thinking of what made you want to commit your time and energy to let others learn about the science of addiction and recovery and the reality of long-term recovery from addiction. Think about why you are personally so committed to this effort, then visualize yourself doing the talk or training. That energy and sincerity will come through no matter what your style and your audience will respond to that in a really positive way.

Most importantly – HAVE FUN! Although we all take addiction and recovery seriously, not taking ourselves so seriously will go a long way to becoming a great trainer!