Importance of Breaks in Adult Learning – Train the Trainer

Breaks keep our brains healthy and play a key role in cognitive abilities such as reading comprehension and divergent thinking (the ability to generate and make sense of novel ideas).

Breaks play an important role during a training session, particularly in the case of longer sessions. If you are delivering a full day training session, then you should give at least 2 breaks during the training day. The first break could be a coffee break in the morning while the second can be a lunch break in the afternoon.

LUNCH BREAK

It is essential that the lunch be a light meal so that participants can come back to the training with energy. The trainer may provide some physical activities, such as a game that involves movement, to participants right after the lunch break in order to re-energize participants. Alternatively, the trainer may keep participants seated right after the lunch break providing them with a video or a brief activity that does not require movement, then follow that with a physical activity. This allows participants to get a brief rest first after lunch before they go ahead with the physical activity. The transitional step helps reduce trainee resistance for carrying out the physical activity the trainer asks them to do after the lunch break.

For shorter training sessions, (i.e. 3 hours in length), a trainer may proceed with one break only. The break should be timed near the middle of the training session.

BREAK LENGTH

As a rule of thumb, the trainer should include 10 minutes of rest for each hour of training. For instance, for a 3-hour training session, the trainer may give a 30-minute break.

For a training day that is 8 hours long, the trainer should provide a total of 80 minutes in breaks. If the trainer is giving 2 breaks, then one of them can be for 20 minutes (coffee break) and the other for 1 hour (lunch break) which together amount for a total of 80 minutes. Alternatively, the 80 minutes may be divided into 30 and 50 minutes respectively. A trainer may even decide to divide the 80 minutes on 3 breaks instead. For instance, the 3 breaks can be set to 20, 40 and 20 minutes respectively, with the longest break being reserved for lunch.

BE FLEXIBLE

The time interval of breaks does not have to be set in stone. A trainer may decide on more or less than 10 minutes of break time for each hour of training depending on circumstances. However, the trainer should be very clear about the exact time the break ends so that trainees come back in time.

Getting your employees to take breaks that are actually beneficial takes some effort. But creating a break-positive environment and educating your workers about the importance of mental and physical rest can help.

BENEFITS OF BREAKS

Improves memory. It has been shown that short, repeated sessions of learning with breaks increase concentration and facilitate the memorization of new contents.

Energy boosts. It is very common to feel drained of energy when we focus all our attention on one task. Resting can be useful to allow your body to recover. Power naps of 10-20 minutes can be a great way to feel revitalized.

Stress Reduction. Constant worry can lead to chronic stress, and learners have been reported to be more likely to suffer higher levels of stress, which can have a physical and mental impact.

Boosts performance and creativity. New creative approaches to problems may arise when doing different activities. So, the next

time you’re stuck, try to take a break, rest and do something different.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Learning is promoted by periods of rest in between training times.
- Taking breaks should be distributed throughout the day when learning a new task.