

## Long-Term Care Survey Alert

### STAFF TRAINING: Jazz Up In-Service Training: Address Differences in Learning and Personal Styles

A one-size fits all approach may not suit anyone.

Is staff training an engaging event at your facility or one that people muddle through?

Wake-up call: People dozing off in the back of the room may pay attention if the instructor crafts the educational sessions in a way that appeals, at least in part, to the way they learn best.

As trainers, however, "we often tend to design training that appeals to our strengths," cautioned **Maureen Sheahan**, with PHI in Bronx, N.Y., during an Advancing Excellence in America's Nursing Homes' Webinar on staff training. But adults learn best when trainers vary teaching activities.

For example, "some of us have to be in motion to learn," she noted. These are the "kinesthetic learners." Auditory learners love to listen, she noted. Some people are visual learners. To identify your predominant learning style, Sheahan suggested considering these key principles:

**Kinesthetic Learners Like Hands-On Learning.** Kinesthetic learners may find themselves doodling when listening. And they may be "easily distracted" during lectures. They like to be "active in the learning" process, Sheahan noted.

They tend to skip the package instructions when trying to assemble something on their own.

What they like: Games, role playing, and return demonstrations.

**Auditory Learners Enjoy Story Telling.** If you're an auditory learner, you may be easily distracted by noise and others talking during the lecture because "your ear is out for anything going on," said Sheahan. These learners may use "mnemonics to memorize material because they like having those kinds of cues." They may not take notes because they are "absorbing the information through their ears."

These learners prefer face-to-face communication.

What they like: Small group activities and learning circles.

**Visual Learners Think in Pictures.** Visual learners gravitate toward pictures, handouts and audiovisual presentations. They "think in visual images instead of words" and may ask the trainer to slow down so they can keep up with the note-taking, Sheahan reported.

They may take notes because they "like the visual of the notes."

What they like: Graphs, tables, and charts.

**Personal Styles Also Figure into the Learning Equation**

A learner's personal and conceptual styles can also affect his training needs. For example, "if you are an introvert, you may need to read material before you talk about it," Sheahan noted. By contrast, an extrovert is going to be "talking to think."

Either one of these styles can be disconcerting to the instructor, depending on the instructor's expectations for how people participate, she noted. "Introverts really appreciate learning circles and round robins" because it "slows down the

need to talk and means you can talk without interruption, which is kind of soothing for introverts."

"Big-picture people" tend to become "bored with details unless you have explained the whole concept and they are putting the details into the concept," Sheahan said.

By contrast, detail-oriented people can become overwhelmed when you describe the big picture and instead want to "know each tree in the forest and don't talk to them about the forest."

#### Turn Differences into a Positive Learning Experience

The spectrums of people with different styles create wonderful dynamics, but also challenges for instructors trying to facilitate classroom discussions, Sheahan pointed out in her presentation.

"One of an instructor's key roles is to reframe all interactions for the positive," Sheahan tells Eli. "When people are being a little hard on each other due to differences in opinions," the instructor should draw out the commonalities and "highlight the value in meaning of what people have to say." People also benefit from learning about the different personality and/or learning styles, Sheahan finds. PHI trainers talk about those during their train the trainer, supervisory, peer mentoring and communication program sessions.

"Knowing about [the styles] helps people find it easier to understand, value and respect each other."

#### Come Up With an Exciting, Eclectic Approach

Providing a variety of teaching approaches can engage people with certain styles, and benefit others in the group as well. For example, says Sheahan, "just because you are not a kinetic learner doesn't mean you don't enjoy getting up and moving around" during learning sessions or find it has other unexpected positive effects on your learning. "Who wants to sit all day and listen?"

In addition, role playing and small groups "get people talking to other people," Sheahan points out. "And that building of community and relationship adds incredible value to the learning experience.

"We hear over and over that ...mixing it up ... is the most important to keeping people actively engaged," Sheahan adds.