TRAINING THE TRAINER

Someone fell asleep in your training session? Now might be the time to look at your training techniques – or consider providing beds.

You don't need to tell a law librarian how important it is for legal practitioners to be able to use online legal resources effectively. These resources have the potential to save practitioners significant time and reduce frustration and uncertainty. We want our users to know about the online resources we have subscribed to on their behalf, what they contain and how to use them correctly and quickly – all the time.

Training is the answer. We certainly have the skill and experience to show our users what these resources can do, but what about how we deliver that training? Why does some training work and others send participants to sleep?

Last November, 14 members of the Australian Law Librarians' Association, Queensland Division attended a one day workshop at the Supreme Court Library in Brisbane, with Natalie Wieland, a lawyer, lecturer at Melbourne University and legal research trainer, called How to Train Legal Personnel in Legal Research. The workshop helped us refine our training skills through a better understanding of how adults learn.

For training to really work, and for a lively and attentive response to our training, the participants not only need to want to learn, they also need the time to learn and the opportunity to practice what they've learnt.

By working out why our intended participants want to learn, we are much more likely to achieve a higher success rate in attracting participants to attend, and when they attend, to listen and learn effectively.

It's a good idea to start with the simple things. Knowing where to actually find a resource on your system and how to open it is essential. Without that knowledge, understanding advanced search techniques isn't much use. The world may not need any more training manuals, but settling down to write one can help you organise your thoughts and plan your session so these important bits of information don't get left out.

Our workshop also looked at ways of personalising training by using stories. The one about someone falling asleep may not be your best opening line. Much better was the experience one participant shared about a time when, just as training on the topic of getting started with legal research was beginning, there was a bomb scare and everyone in the building had to evacuate, departing via 23 floors of fire escape and marshalling in the park. After regrouping at ground level, the trainer whipped out her iPad and gave an on the spot demonstration of the ability to do legal research from anywhere. It impressed.

It probably also added to a sense of enjoyment of that training course, for teacher and students alike. If you enjoy the session yourself, it can be contagious.

It's important to 'sell' training opportunities to users. We have the skills to offer wise and effective training to extremely busy people and, of course, that's not limited to the legal profession. It's true of information professionals across all sectors.

And the best tip? Finish a little early and you'll always finish on a positive note!

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