



Why Video Taping Is a Wonderful Training Tool And How to Use It Effectively

Some Guidelines to Follow for Success

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The use of videotape as a training vehicle has been an accepted practice for over 25 years. Training programs for subjects like Problem Solving, Creativity, Meeting Management, Presentation, Selling, Negotiation, Coaching, Decision Making, Cultural Diversity and Leadership are among the many kinds that use video to increase the probability of course participants modifying their behavior. Videotaping can be a wonderful way to train people, and in many of the programs I have taught or experienced, videotaped practice sessions have been the highlight. However, it must be used carefully and sensitively; otherwise it can be quite dangerous.

Let's face it, the ability to see yourself, as others do, is an extraordinary opportunity. When video is used properly, the feedback a person can receive from his or her peers can be enlightening, insightful and helpful. Most people want to improve and grow; therefore the opportunity to observe oneself using new skills and applying new approaches can be a powerful help.

Videotaping Affects Behavioral Change

The videotape experience will often be the difference between a participant simply understanding the intended value of what was taught, as opposed to making a decision to try to change his or her behavior. Without the use of video, training can only achieve understanding and awareness of the content, whereas behavioral modification is much more likely to occur with the use of video.

In programs that I teach at Ogilvy like Consultative Selling Skills and Interactive Innovation, I am convinced that without videotape the programs would have much less impact and would not be received as positively.

I worry that the programs I teach without video can result in people thinking they understand the behavior skills I have taught when in fact they don't. This is unfortunate because thinking you know something that you don't can cause problems down the road. Ask any Creative or Account person who is involved with a client who thinks he/she knows more than the agency person. It can be frustrating both in day-to-day activities and in training programs.

How Video Can Destroy

Yet with all its value and all the positive things video can do it can be destructive have heard and even witnessed horror stories about how people have used video negatively in training. I have even heard trainers brag about how they were able to break somebody down through the use of videotaped exercises.

Needless to say, I always bring to the trainer's attention the harm such actions on their part could cause, but these kinds of attitudes do prevail in some organizations and the results can be devastating.

Let us step back and look at this. A participant attends a training usually because someone such as the immediate manager has suggested it. They are there because they were sent, not because they chose to attend. If videotaped role plays or practice exercises are to be used, it is often a surprise. In light of this, *the trainer must take extreme care as to how he or she uses video*. The trainer must establish guidelines to follow when providing feedback to the people who are taped. One reason videotape is used in most cases is to increase self awareness; providing feedback is an effective way to accomplish this. If feedback will be provided, certain criteria should be established to ensure that the experience is positive.

The first and most important criterion is that the feedback be solicited. By this we mean that the trainer approaches the person whose tape is about to be reviewed, and asks him or her where they would like the group to focus their comments.

Often a participant will not ask for anything in particular and will suggest that the group offers comments on anything they see. That is acceptable but I still encourage trainers to draw the person out and explain the value of letting the group know what would be of primary interest to him or her. Remember, very few people are in the programs we teach because they chose to be viewed by their peers on videotape. With that in mind it is important to ask the person what he or she wants from the group, and to make sure the group responds accordingly.

How the Group Should Respond

The other criteria have to do with the group rather than the person who has been videotaped or, as some of us like to call him or her, the “tapee.”

1. First the feedback should be specific. Specificity is important because it helps the tapee know exactly what was intended. Hearing something like “that was terrific” feels good but it doesn’t tell the person specifically what to continue to use. An alternative approach would be to say “it was terrific how when your subordinate resisted your idea you didn’t become defensive but instead asked him or her to elaborate on why he or she was uncomfortable with what you had to say.” Another way to encourage specificity is to ask people to explain why a positive behavior was important. Using the previous example, the provider of the feedback could add a comment like “That is important because it shows the subordinate that you are interested in hearing his or her point of view and doing that models the behavior you want him or her to demonstrate.”
2. Feedback should be appropriate. *Participants need to know that we are focusing on things within the span of the tapee’s control.* This means that comments about things like appearance, diction, vocabulary and fillers such as “um” or “you know” probably won’t be helpful. If the tapee uses these fillers, nobody will see or hear it more clearly than he or she, so there isn’t any great need to spend a lot of time discussing it. All that will accomplish is embarrassment for the tapee, and, as we discussed earlier, that’s dangerous.

Appropriate feedback should focus on the material covered in the program. There is tremendous value in giving people feedback on their style or how they interact with others. However, if that isn’t what the course is teaching, and the person hasn’t requested that kind of feedback, it probably isn’t appropriate.

Verify What was Said

3. Feedback should be verifiable. By this I mean that when one participant gives the tapee feedback he or she should be able to verify what was said. For example, if the person observing a videotape wants to discuss how sincere the tapee came across in a client interaction, it is more meaningful if the observer refers to something specific that happened during the taped exercise. A comment that refers to an action will be more meaningful if the situation is described in detail. Rather than just telling the tapee that they were sincere, the person who gives the feedback must relate it to what happened. For example, “Susan, when the client asked why you were taking such a strong

position regarding the strategy, you looked at him directly and explained why you thought it was too risky in light of their tenuous position in the marketplace; you came across as very sincere.” This type of feedback will be more likely to have a positive impact.

We all Love Feedback

Feedback is something we all need. No matter how quickly many of us say that we don't like having others tell us how we are doing, the reality is that most of us crave feedback from our peers, managers and even our subordinates. A study by the Yankolovich Group in the late 1970's indicated that the strongest need of young creative people was what they described as “an intense desire for feedback; even if it is negative.” The implication was that no feedback at all was worse than feedback that only focused on the negative.

This is an extraordinary statement; it not only underscores the importance of feedback, but also provides us with a better understanding of the next criterion which suggests that feedback be **balanced**.

4. Balanced feedback suggests that the person on tape has the opportunity to hear what is working for him or her as well as what is getting in the way. Most of us tend first to look at what isn't working. We are so task oriented that we want to look first at what is preventing us from being as good as we can be and then figuring out ways to improve. We do that in evaluating our own performance and we do it in giving feedback to others. We don't do this because we are negative, but that is the way it comes across. In the process of doing so we prevent ourselves and those that we are talking to from hearing important things they need to hear – the things that contribute to success.

Lead from Strength

We must realize that we don't give balanced feedback just to make it easier for the tapee to hear about the areas where improvement is needed. We do it because people need to know what is working for them so they can use their strengths more effectively.

Knowing what you do well and understanding how that impacts others is important for people to understand. The trainer needs to take care to insure that the tapee hears the positives as well as the opportunities for improvement. Quite often people observing themselves on videotape will gloss over the positives or request that the group only focus on the areas to build upon.

That is something I work very hard to disallow. I remember one participant who indicated he didn't want to waste time hearing "what went well," and only wanted to hear about his deficiency. I said to him, "If we do that you'll have a lot of useful data about what not to do, but you will not learn what will be useful to continue doing and that would be a missed opportunity for you that I will not allow to happen."

5. The final criterion: insist that the feedback offered by the participants be helpful. Too often, I am sorry to say, participants in a group will use the videotaped practice exercises as a way to show off. That is the antithesis of why we use videotape. For people to use it as a way to illustrate how much more effective they would be in a given situation is exactly what we don't want to have happen. Alternative approaches to what was observed are very useful and should be encouraged, but not at the expense of the tapee. When feedback is given, the trainer needs to constantly ask him or herself how helpful it will be for the person on the receiving end. If it doesn't appear to be helpful then it is time to step in. After all, we use videotape in our training programs to improve the chances of behavior modification and to increase people's self awareness so they will improve their performance. If the feedback provided doesn't meet the criterion of being helpful, we haven't been successful in achieving that significant goal.

Strive to Help the Tapee

Typically, I present these criteria prior to debriefing the videotapes we make. I explain that when we are observing the videotape, everyone is working for the person on tape. I compare the role of the tapee with the problem owner in a problem-solving session. Everyone is available to help that person accomplish what is important to him or her. That serves as a good lead into the "ground rules" for the tape debriefs which are the criteria we have just discussed.

Remember, videotape can be a marvelous tool in training programs if we use it appropriately and follow guidelines like the ones I have listed. The trainer's role becomes most critical during tape debriefs as he or she must make sure that the ground rules are followed and that the experience is a positive one for all.

A good principle to follow is what Carl Rogers referred to in his book on Encounter Groups, which I paraphrase by saying: "We must remember to be responsible to the group but not for the group." If we follow these criteria we will do just that and the videotape experience will prove to be a positive and memorable one for the participants in the program.