

# TRAINING VOLUNTEERS

## A Process for Learning

By Rick Lynch

**I**N THE FALL ISSUE OF VAL, I DISCUSSED THE process of choosing the right training method when you are designing learning experiences for your volunteers. I stressed the importance of choosing a training method that is most appropriate for the kind of training you are doing. Just as burros, surfboards and jet planes each may be the best means of transportation under certain circumstances, so each training method can be an appropriate or inappropriate choice given the type of learning, the time available, logistical constraints and other factors discussed in that article. Choosing an atomic submarine as a more appropriate form of transarctic travel than a dune buggy is not, however, the only thing you have to do to make sure you get from Kamchatka to Thule. There are other things to do to make sure your volunteers learn from the training methods you have chosen.

### Experience-Identify-Analyze-Generalize

The simplest, most economical way to present the process of training design is to use a four-step model which goes by the letters EIAG. EIAG is not, as you might expect, Tarzan's favorite noun of address, but stands for the first letters of the four steps in a tested adult learning model. EIAG can guide you in making sure your volunteers get the most from the training you provide.

The "E" in EIAG stands for *experience*. People learn from experiences; therefore, one way of looking at your job as a trainer is to see it as one of creating ex-

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periences from which your volunteers can learn. These experiences are the methods outlined in the preceding article—the lectures, role-plays, panel discussions, case studies and other training techniques. They should be chosen and created with care to make sure they are appropriate to the type of training, achieve the objectives, offer variety in a long program, and maximize the trainee's feeling of involvement.

The "I" in EIAG stands for *identity*. Once volunteers have experienced what you have created for them, the next step is to have them identify what it was and what it meant to them. For example, following a panel discussion, some questions you might ask in helping your volunteers identify the experience are:

"What point sticks out most in your mind?"

"How did you feel about the positions the various speakers took?"

"What did you hear that most appealed to you?"

"Which speaker dominated the discussion?"

"What were the main points of speaker X's position?"

In designing a training event, have a number of such questions prepared in advance so you can help the volunteers identify the experience from which they are supposed to learn.

The next step in learning from experience is to *analyze* it. Again, have questions prepared that help trainees identify *why* the experience was as it was. For example, after new volunteers at a crisis clinic observe another volunteer handling an emergency call (the experience) and discuss what happened (identification), the questions the trainer asks might include:

"Why did the volunteer say what she did at the beginning?"

"What's wrong with saying that?"

"Why did the caller react the way he did?"

"Why did her approach to calming him down work so well?"

"G" is for *generalize*. To be useful, the learning must *apply* to the volunteer's own experience; it must be generalizable beyond the training experience. In this last step, try to help volunteers build such generalizations based on their analysis of the identified experience. Examples of questions that help trainees do this include:

"How can you use this in your own situation?"

"If you were going to give another person a list of do's and don't's to guide them in doing your volunteer

assignment, what would you tell them, based on this experience?"

"As a general principle, what should you do in such situations?"

Let's examine EIAG further. Say you are a school volunteer coordinator, and you are going to train volunteers to help severely handicapped children learn basic skills, such as getting themselves undressed. How would you design training in this area for Haskell, a volunteer who never has done this before?

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## EIAG to Provide Information

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First, you need to give Haskell a lot of information. If he never has worked with mentally impaired students before, you might give him some background on the handicapping condition. Explain the objective of his working with Johnny, that he is to teach him to take his shirt off as part of the larger objective of dressing and undressing himself. You want the volunteer to know how this fits into the broader educational plans for Johnny this year. You also want him to understand the reason for doing all this—that it is important to Johnny's future happiness. Finally, you want Haskell to know what to do, that he is to give the command to Johnny to take off his shirt and reward Johnny with a spoonful of applesauce when he completes the task.

To provide Haskell with the information, you might use a method that combines reading and lecture. The next step is to get Haskell to identify what he has learned, then to analyze it, and finally to generalize or to apply it to his situation. For example, a sequence of questions might go like this:

"What do you know about severely impaired children now that you didn't know before?" (*identification*)

"How has this changed your attitude toward working with Johnny?" (*identification*)

"Why are you even more eager to work with Johnny?" (*analysis*)

"Why is it important for Johnny to live as independently as possible?" (*analysis*)

"How do you see your involvement with Johnny as helping him lead a more independent life?" (*generalization*)

You do each of these steps—identify, analyze, generalize—after each experience, whether it is a lecture, a panel, a book to read, a discussion of Johnny's learning objectives, or a talk with current volunteers. In this way, you make sure learning takes place, rather than leaving it up to chance that Haskell does all these things in his head.

While the old maxim that learning is the trainee's responsibility is true, it is also true that the trainer is responsible for creating a structure in which learning

can take place most efficiently. And that is what you do by following the EIAG format.

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## EIAG to Demonstrate the Skill

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The next thing we want to do with Haskell is to demonstrate the skill we want him to learn. One of the easiest ways to do this is to have Haskell observe a teacher conducting the undressing program with Johnny. But again, it isn't enough merely to show Haskell what to do. To make sure he learns from that experience, we need to include the next three steps in the EIAG model. So after he has observed the teacher, you might have a discussion with him in which you ask the following questions:

"What did you see the teacher doing with Johnny?" (*identification*)

"What problems did she encounter?" (*identification*)

"What techniques did she employ that seemed to work well?" (*identification*)

"Why did these techniques work better than some others she tried?" (*analysis*)

"Based on what you saw, what are some things you will avoid and some things you will do when you work with Johnny?" (*generalization*)

It is more important that the trainer have questions than it is to have all the answers. People learn best when they do their own analysis and generalization. They also retain knowledge for longer periods than if you merely tell them everything there is to know.

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## EIAG to Role-Play

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The next thing you might do in training Haskell is to role-play the situation he is being trained for, perhaps with you or another volunteer or staff member playing the role of Johnny. By role-playing, we create a safe situation in which Haskell's mistakes can be used as learning experiences rather than causes for concern about the impact on Johnny.

At the end of this experience, you go through the remaining steps of the EIAG process:

"Haskell, how would you describe what just happened here?"

("I don't know. I seem to have gotten my own clothes off.")

"Why do you think that happened? Were my instructions for the role-play unclear? Did you think you were supposed to play Johnny?"

("No. I guess I really wanted some applesauce.")

"I see. Do you see any drawbacks to doing the program this way?"

("I guess I might be kind of embarrassed in front of the other volunteers, them being women and all.")

"Well, are there any good points you can think of in what you just did?"

("Hmmm. Well, I guess it was pretty good modeling. I got my shirt off in five seconds flat. I'll bet Mary Ellen never did that.")

"That's true. You did very well. Do you think if you were to try modeling for Johnny in the future, that you'd do anything differently?"

("Yeah. I guess I'd make sure it was part of the program, something well-planned and not just a spur-of-the-moment urge of my own.")

"Very good. Based on this insight, what would you tell someone else about working on a similar program with another student?"

("Well, it seems that when you're in the classroom, one of the things that's sometimes hard to keep in mind is that your behavior has a big effect on the kids. You need to keep the learning objectives in sight at all times. You have to think of the child first and your own needs second. You have to remember why you're there.")

After this discussion, you might role-play the situation several more times, each time following the experience with the IAG part of the process.

## EIAG and Volunteering

But when Haskell does try the lesson with Johnny, we can continue to help him grow by using this as another learning experience. During his first few days or weeks on the job, you can meet with him after he works with Johnny and do the same sort of thing you did after the role-play—help him identify what happened, analyze why, and develop generalizations which can guide him in the future. In fact, many successful managers of volunteer programs do this kind of thing with all their volunteers at regular intervals during the year to make sure they continue to grow and develop on-the-job.

The examples I have used have shown the trainer very much in control of the learning discussion. In fact, while the trainer needs to structure the discussion s/he need not be present at all. Following a film, for example, the trainer might break the trainees into small groups and tell them to discuss three or four questions written on the board, such as:

"What points that stick out most in your mind?"

"Why are they important?"

"How will you use this information on the job?"

This approach gets everyone involved in the IAG process. When the groups report their conclusions, everyone can profit from the analysis and generalizations of others.

Often, you can use the trainees' previous life experiences as the basis for learning instead of creating a

new experience for them. If you are training volunteers to work with families in a Planned Parenthood program, for example, you might start out with an orientation to helping skills that proceeds this way:

"Individually, I'd like you all to think of a time when you were given important help in your life by another person, help that you truly found 'helpful.'"

"Then I'd like you to think of a time when someone tried to give you help and the assistance was not so 'helpful.'"

"Once you've done this, I'd like you to take a few minutes and write down some thoughts about why one situation was more helpful than the other. What differences were there in the way the helper tried to give help? What other factors made a difference?"

"After you have done this, I'll ask you to share your thoughts in groups of six and to draw some conclusions about helping, which you will want to keep in mind as you work with families in this program."

Here you have asked the volunteers to *identify* two life experiences, *analyze* what made them different, and *generalize* about the helping process. Of course, you could also proceed by giving them a lecture on the theory of helping or by having them view a film on ways of giving help. But why go to the trouble of coming up with such artificial experiences for them when they already have had some which will do just as well? In fact, their own experiences are probably better because they are more personal and vivid than many you can create.

In conducting a training session, it is easy to fall into the trap of assuming that because the volunteers are intelligent and capable, they will see the obvious conclusions in the experience. Therefore, you needn't take the time to go through the IAG steps. This is especially true when trying to cover a lot of material in a short time.

We need to remember, however, that it is our role to help people learn, not to cover a lot of material. Even the most intelligent people may have difficulty applying unfamiliar information. They go away frustrated because you only told them about the manufacturing process and not about making widgets. As a general rule, if you have to choose between giving people more material and making sure they can apply the material you already have given them, it is best to opt for the latter.

As you begin to use the EIAG model, it is important that the sequence of questions you use be natural. Sometimes we have a tendency to get locked into our prepared sequence of questions, while a trainee's response might naturally bring up other questions. If you have prepared a series of identification questions, and you get an unexpected response to the first one, it might be better to go on and analyze that response than to proceed with your other questions.

The EIAG learning model is effective because it is a natural one. It merely makes conscious the unconscious method we employ to learn all the time. When you employ it, you are merely making sure your volunteers complete all the steps in the learning process instead of leaving it up to chance that they will do it on their own. ♡

# Some Principles, Reflections, and Suggestions

By John C. Schwarz

Volunteers undertake such a vast variety of roles and tasks that no points on training apply to all or perhaps even to most of them. These observations, however, are probably applicable to many needs and many training situations. They are presented in no particular order of priority. Good sense and experience will suggest many points not included here.

- **Who trains?** Choice of instructors or moderators is important, and a careful orienting of that person to your volunteers' needs is important. Random or semi-random speech-making is not training.
- **Planning.** Who participates in designing the training? What are the real needs of the volunteers (and agency) and what are the objectives? Just what problems do the volunteers encounter? Ask them and learn from them. Build that into the training, definitely and emphatically.
- **Staff involved.** When possible, useful to incorporate into training those staff members with whom volunteers will be in contact on the job.
- **Orientation.** Distinguish between orientation and real training. Both are important, but generally one is not the other. Perhaps they sometimes blend, yet real job training generally calls for something more specific.
- **Seriousness.** Depending on the tasks to be performed, it is important to aim at a middle target of impressing trainees with the seriousness and responsibility involved. But raising undue alarm is useless.
- **Atmosphere.** Learning is best accomplished in a climate that is relaxed and comfortable and encouraging. "We plan to embarrass no one; our aim is to put

no one 'on the spot.' "

- **Handouts.** Not all training is done in verbal form. Printed materials are useful, including some sort of "Guidelines for Volunteers."
- **Experiential.** Whereas the lecture method is probably here to stay it nevertheless is seen as less and less useful. Training should, insofar as possible, involve experience, practice, rehearsal—role plays, analysis of real situations and problems, etc.
- **Supervision.** In many volunteer roles the best form of training is probably supervision available and applied on the job, in the work context. Supervision here means not 'bossing,' but directing and supporting and available to guide as needed. Not all training is labeled "training," nor does it always need to occur at the beginning. Supervision is 'along the way.'
- **In-service.** Clearly important and useful, if you can manage it. In some situations in-service training is essential, in others it is more of a stimulus or refreshment or reward.
- **Socialization.** Training is also a socialization process in the life, customs, style, ethos of an agency.
- **Audio cassettes.** Inexpensive, individualized. You can put good material, often, on tape cassettes for use by individuals when and as needed. Can be a very flexible training tool.
- **Participation.** Important, when appropriate, that trainees contribute

from their own experience. Draw out that experience and build on it, as it applies to the tasks in view. Affirm and support that experience, insofar as possible.

- **Sequence.** Often there may be little need for orderly or logical sequence of subject matter. With adults you can sometimes begin anywhere, especially in a discussion context. This assumes the organic nature of much knowledge.
- **Tasks in training.** Small or group or individual projects can be useful in training. "You have 45 minutes in which to design your own community mental health center, chart it out, set priorities, and be ready to explain it."
- **Mini-professionals?** Is a volunteer a small-scale imitation of the professionals in your agency? Is that the aim in training? Is the aim of training to get volunteers to 'ape' or imitate the professionals? Maybe yes, maybe no? Maybe somewhat? Is it more desirable to let volunteer trainees *watch* professionals demonstrate and model the behavior—or let the volunteers explore and work it out under direction, or both?
- **In the agency's name.** Volunteer must realize that she/he now acts in the name of this agency. Fundamental point with many implications, just as with any staff person.
- **Individual Styles.** Respect the individual styles of individual volunteers. Bring this out rather than stifle or bury it.
- **Correction.** Let correction be with courtesy and candor. Let commendation be equally candid, and frequent—insofar as it can be genuine. Avoiding correction will likely do harm in the long run.
- **Evaluation.** All training should be evaluated, if you hope to improve on it the next time. ♡

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