HOW TO...

DESIGN ENGAGING PRE-COURSE WORK

Asking people to complete some pre-course work before a live event is valuable at so many levels.

- It makes sure that everyone completing the training all have a common starting point, and certain assumptions can reasonably be made during the training.
- It helps to get delegates into the right mindset for learning and introduces some key topics.
- It can save time during the training event, potentially reducing the length of an event, which has cost implications and disruption to operations.
- It can help to link the learning to the working environment and so aid the transfer of learning.

Pre-course work can take many forms: It may be as simple as thinking about personal objectives, or reading an article/watching a short video. It may be quite extensive and involve completing e-learning modules or doing a substantial piece of work. Only you can decide what is appropriate for your topic, your environment and your delegates.

Common things to include in pre-course work are:

- Questionnaires (to save time during the event and allow more time on interpretation/discussion)
- Case studies (for similar reasons)
- Reading (if people need to have read the latest policy documents for example)
- Watching a YouTube video (to introduce concepts)
- Collation of information (to talk about real-life examples on the event)
- Identification of personal objectives (to focus the mind)

Whatever form it takes, the most important thing to bear in mind is that the task is something that will **add value** to the event and can be **completed alone**, with no further guidance.

Here are 7 tips for success...

1. **Explain it!** - Whether it's in an introductory paragraph, or a separate email, be clear about what the pre-course work is for, and why it adds value.

2. **Link to course content** - I generally recap the course aims and objectives in the pre-course work to help the delegates to see how the pre-course work links directly to the content.

3. **Be clear** - Pre-course work should be able to be completed without any further explanation or guidance. Ensure that you are clear about exactly what needs to be done. I often include a list at the start or a checklist at the end.

4. **Manage expectation** - It's a good idea to specify how long it will take to complete the pre-course work to allow people to plan it into their diaries. If they need any special equipment or internet access, you also need to be clear about this.

5. **Make it look appealing** - No matter what format you are using, make your pre-course work appealing. It is the 'starter' before the main course and sets the scene about what to expect. Appealing materials are also more likely to capture attention and be looked at, rather than simply sending a list of tasks by email, which may well be missed.

6. **Balance it** - I like to include at least 3 different elements in pre-course work: 1) Something to read/watch, so delegates are prepped on some of the key theories. 2) Something to think about – jotting down ideas on a particular matter starts them thinking about the content and it can save time in specific activities/discussions. 3) Something to do – a questionnaire, quiz or research encourages them to bring their own information to the workshop and plants the seed that the workshop will be active.

7. **Send out in good time** - Sending out the pre-course work 2-3 weeks before a workshop seems to be optimal. Send it too close to the workshop and people may not have time to complete it. Too far in advance and they will either file it for later (and then forget), or do it straight away and then forget what they did, so will have no benefit on the workshop.