

# Growing People But I Don't Want To Train!

**How to reach non-participants and build a committed team.**

by **JIM PALUCH**

**S**O you've begun a training regimen and are focused on helping your staff improve themselves and the company. You've got a group of diverse personnel ranging from sales people to office workers to the equipment maintenance crew and greenhouse hands. Everyone is primed to learn. And in walks Bob, five minutes late with a storm cloud over his head.

He sits in the back of the room with his arms crossed. As soon as he takes his seat, he whispers under his breath that being here is a huge waste of time. And pretty soon, he's got people in his corner, thinking about the other things they could be doing, like making sales calls or scheduling deliveries.

And then the trainer has a situation. How to proceed?

First off, realize that these people exist. Acknowledge them. They're the destroyers, the energy vampires, the people who look like they'd rather be anywhere else, and they're ready to take anyone with them. Moving past this negative mentality and shifting into a productive mindset takes a fair bit of flexibility.

## **Motivating The Non-Participant**

Non-participants are usually people who have a desire to learn, but for whatever reason, have a difficult time

expressing it. They may not understand the training program and may be afraid of not knowing an answer when called upon. They may be worried that others will improve faster than they will, and they'll get left behind; consequently, they try to hold everyone back. They may have a learning disorder they want to conceal. They could have a low opinion of themselves and aren't afraid to spread it around to others. They're tired of the same person training, but don't want to offer any suggestions to change things.

The list could go on and on, but I believe every non-participant can contribute and would offer incredible ideas if they had the courage to speak up.

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Understand there is no silver bullet that will magically motivate the unmotivated. However, there are several strategies that can make this process fruitful. One of the worst things to do is pay too much attention to negative people. They carry a destroyer mentality and their attitude can be

infectious. Attention could be exactly what they want. Reverse the situation by asking them not to participate.

Invite them to leave, saying that you'll be giving them a break from training for a few weeks while you cover in-depth material with key people.

Next, hold a session called “idealistic redesign” where you ask the rest of the group to brainstorm on what is effective in train-

ing sessions and what could be improved. In the process, you may find some ideas to enliven your sessions and learn a few reasons why some people don't want to participate.

## **What You Measure Gets Done**

Joe Burns, president of Color Burst, a flower-bed installation and maintenance company in Atlanta, Ga., takes the training process seriously, and although his meetings are usually energetic, he has some good advice for people who want to improve their training sessions.

“I used to bang my head against a wall about how to best train my employees,” Burns says. “When we started the Training Challenge a few years back, it started out as a way to have fun and keep people learning.” Over time, however, Burns discovered a few things about training that elevated the process to



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the next level.

"I'm a believer in the idea that what you measure gets done," he says. "So, at our meetings, I ask all our managers what they've done to improve their knowledge and work. Sometimes they'll go to local landscape association meetings or hold extra on-site training sessions." But that's just the start. Burns also conducts monthly random on-site inspections where he actually spends a day in the field and asks his crews how they make decisions.

"I'm a believer in continuing education," he says. "I can't give a better testimony to this fact than by showing that I'm living it. When employees see their boss out in the field willing to learn, then that attitude rubs off. And I learn all kinds of things like which pesticides work best in certain situations to better pruning and mulching techniques."

### The End Of The Rainbow

Setting an example and holding employees accountable for their training are the biggest keys that keep sessions interesting at Color Burst. But one other factor also fig-

## Training Outside The Box

Here are a few unique training ideas we at JP Horizons have used with success:

- Change the meeting's location.
- Use a short film clip to liven things up.
- Give non-participants some canned Silly String. Tell them to set it off when they hear a good idea.
- Give certificates or other small prizes for meeting training goals.
- Hold a meeting called "Why I Hate Training." Dim the lights and play funeral music. Try to get at least 50 reasons, then pick the top five and ask for ideas on how to fix them.

ures into the equation. And that's the reward for learning.

"People always want to know 'what's in it for me?' Especially the negative ones," Burns says. "So I tell them learning these things will make their jobs easier or save them time. And then the biggest carrot is to offer prizes for meeting certain training goals. I'm always amazed at how eager and interested people become when they figure out that there's something at stake.

"It's hard to drive someone to want

to train, but when I tell them the prize for completing a certain program is a four-day off-site retreat with managers that includes fun, food and other activities, they instantly perk up."

When managers show an interest in training, they create a trickle-down effect that affects employees at all levels. Shake things up a little, break out of your routines and offer your employees reasons to learn.

"The key is to show employees how training will improve their lives," Burns says. "Get them to buy into it by demonstrating an interest in them and then offer incentives. The payoff is worth it."

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**About the author:** Jim Paluch is president of JP Horizons, a group of training professionals that has been helping green industry companies develop a culture of learning for over 17 years. For more information on the Training Challenge, go to [www.jphorizons.com](http://www.jphorizons.com).