

# Your Workshop Title Sounded Different

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**Abstract:** When it comes to the common practitioner, continuing education can be characterized as a means to an end versus an exploration and immersion of knowledge, wisdom, and experiences. As an instructor, I have utilized present-day strategies such as video, roleplay, and self-assessments to deliver a successful and relevant learning experience. My mission is to help practitioners bypass classroom distractions and engage their imaginations for professional and personal growth.

**Keywords:** practitioner, mindset, imagination, learning techniques

After I give the preliminary overview of any continuing education program I am leading, I ask workshop practitioners their reason(s) for attending. As an instructor, part of me hopes to hear flattering responses such as “I want to learn about this topic so I can help others,” or “I am so excited to be here. I love learning new ideas.”

Instead, I often receive these practitioner comments: “I’m here for the continuing education credits,” or “Your workshop title sounded different.”

Although many practitioners have grown accustomed to the replay of “just another workshop” for their license maintenance, others may seek alternative and attractive continuing education opportunities that promote personal growth. I have observed that contemporary continuing education practitioners derive satisfaction from classroom exchanges between teacher and practitioners. They greatly appreciate the most current and practical new knowledge and the wisdom to be gained from their participation in a meaningful professional encounter. This sort of teacher-practitioner workshop does more than just tick off the minutes—it explores fresh ideas that create more enlightened perspectives. Such experiences can serve to jumpstart participants’ imagination to more readily absorb new material and apply it beyond the classroom.

From one vantage, continuing education presents an opportunity to progressively shape one’s profession and help evolve how it impacts society. In this narrative, I discuss continuing education’s challenges and opportunities from the perspective of both practitioner and instructor.

## Practitioner Mindset

In my experience, when practitioners peruse the myriad of continuing education workshops, they are primarily looking for a practical solution for their most important need—continuing education credit. Informal surveys I have used to poll my continuing education program practitioners find that the attendees often are facing a mandatory deadline with their license bureau for a requisite number of credits or are looking for a class at a specific time and date to fit in with busy home and work routines.

My experience also reveals that practitioners might select a program to deepen their own

expertise in order to best serve clients or stay atop of profession changes. For example, a healthcare case worker selects courses focused on trends of the assisted elderly who reside outside of the home, management of chronic illness in the home, recovery from physical or emotional trauma, or other similar situations.

Based on a combination of subjective and intellectual needs, it appears practitioners narrow down course offerings based solely on the words or phrases in a continuing education workshop title. If none of the words or phrases appears attractive, potential practitioners likely move on to another offering. Consideration of an instructor's capabilities is not typically an aspect of a practitioner's selection process. It may or may not occur to the practitioner to search for instructors who, by reputation or word of mouth, employ a livelier learning approach. Expectations for the deliverer of content appear to fall to the bottom of the scale.

### **Instructor Mindset**

While the practitioner focuses on the pragmatic and academic aspects of course selection, instructors might take an alternative approach. Some argue that instructors nowadays place greater confidence in human learning potential. As an instructor, I am committed to four objectives when creating and presenting a program.

#### **1. Tapping into the Intersection of the Relevant, Useful, and Interesting**

For this first point, the instructor should have a vision for how the “current” relevant topics in society fit into the core continuing education material and integrate user-friendly and appealing content. For example, I've observed the role and impact of humor in multiple workplaces. In workplaces where leaders had promoted healthy humor already, I easily bonded with co-workers, felt empowered, and formed strong outlets for dealing with hardship. My imagination percolated with ideas, and I joyfully looked forward to each workday.

In settings where competition and showmanship dominated, humor was expressed in the forms of laughing at others, sarcasm, and microaggressions. Relationships felt ambiguous and tenuous due to underlying unspoken motivations and agendas. Without humor to soften the daily demands at work, burnout became a forgone conclusion. Negativity was a disease others and I picked up on the job, and the only cure was to leave the organization.

Like me, many social workers are employed in the human business of treating those wounded in the body, mind, and heart. The continuous exposure to pain and suffering has a wearing effect on professional caregivers. With professional stress on the rise and billions spent by employers to retain engaged, creative, and productive workers, there is one tool most able to address these challenges—humor.

#### **2. Distilling Research, Published Materials, and Expert Insights into Simple Messages to Use for Personal Reflection and at the Workplace**

Teaching humor awareness comes from a personal mission to highlight differences between

healthy and unhealthy humor behavior. Although rarely encouraged and celebrated, healthy humor offers individuals and organizations a means of managing hardship, relaxing the body, and providing a sense of belonging. Healthy humor removes the formal walls between professionals and their leaders, clients, and the community at large. Unhealthy humor burdens people with additional stress and creates distance and discomfort.

The challenge in outlining a humor workshop for clinical professionals has been the lack of dedicated research in the field. The workshop ultimately became an intricately woven series of highlights and stories from many disciplines and individuals who recognize and appreciate the enormous power of humor.

### **3. Employing a Variety of Learning Techniques to Engage the Mind and Heart**

Instructors have their fair share of challenges in today's educational setting. Instead of paying attention and staying in the moment, practitioners:

- use the program as a time to catch up with other tasks.
- are distracted by lack of sleep, food, or drink.
- attach to their devices and have difficulty disconnecting from social media.

Instructors can no longer expect the full attention of practitioners, and it is recommended that today's instructors accept distraction as the uninvited guest in the room. To excuse the guest would cause unnecessary disruption. It may be in the best interest of all involved to request that the uninvited guest be silenced. This will now allow the instructor to utilize other sanctioned teaching measures to which practitioners are also much accustomed—such as video, guided imagery, movement, and self-assessments.

Kinash et al. (2015) highlight a “disruptive pedagogy” in which video enhances the learning framework from didactic to constructivist with practitioners better able to manage their information-gathering (p. 129). Practitioners report through surveys and interviews that video aids learning in a number of ways (Mitra et al., 2010). These include assisting in comprehension and recalling information, providing alternative perspectives, stimulating interest, motivating further research, and increasing knowledge (Kay & Kletskin, 2012).

### **4. Offering a Forum Based on Mutual Respect, Service, Understanding, Compassion, and Clear Communication**

These teaching components may appear obvious—however, their translation between instructor and practitioners takes effort. Beyond talking points, how is the instructor offering touchpoints that resonate with practitioners? Welcoming practitioners as they walk in the door, placing materials on the tables, and possessing and radiating calmness create a welcoming and comfortable environment.

Anyone can read slides and go through the motions of giving a continuing education presentation. Connecting with, appreciating, and rewarding practitioners can turn an ordinary

program into an extraordinary experience. How does the program evolve from monologue to dialogue? How excited are practitioners throughout the workshop, and are they inspired to share their new knowledge? These are the questions required of modern continuing education instructors.

### **Conclusion**

This article offers the following key takeaways: First, the continuing education instructor needs to appreciate that the participating practitioner has made decisions about the workshop before entering the classroom. These decisions acknowledge interest in the topic and frame an expectation of the instructor message delivery and showmanship. Second, the instructor must interactively build momentum in the classroom using creative engagement. Because of today's widespread technology usage, this may require instructors to avail themselves of contemporary media in and beyond the classroom. This and other forms of technology are a positive influencer and stand among the new rewards of continuing education.

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