A Learning Paths Whitepaper

Rapid Design of Instructor Led Training

By Steve Rosenbaum

From Slow to Fast

After 30 years of designing training, I've seen hundreds of workshops, seminars and webinars developed. Some come together in a matter of weeks, others take months and there are some that take years. The one thing that is certain about this process is that the longer it takes to develop a program, the more expensive it's going to be.

The best place to start driving time out of the development process is to look at those factors that add the most time. The most significant cause of slow development is the review and approval process. Since most training results from a business need or request, someone else has to review and approve all of the training deliverables. This becomes a slow and tedious process when these stakeholders

- Don't know what they a really want
- Aren't truly committed to and supportive of training
- Aren't trained in how to review and assess good training

I can't tell you how many times I've asked managers and executives to review documents and instead of commenting on the content they look for typos. It's also very common that you give review teams a few weeks to review the document and they don't start looking at until the last day.

There are a number of ways to address these issues, but unfortunately they require a level of consulting skills that most instructional designers lack. First, it requires that the training or project leader assumes the role of learning expert. It needs to be clear that the client internal or external is the content expert, but how the training is developed and the overall approach is the province of the learning expert. Developing and establish this expertise requires being able to present and talk about:

- A set of clear learning principles
- A clearly defined development process
- Examples of success

It's useful to start any project with a quick PowerPoint presentation on each of these points. In the presentation of the development process, it's critical to define roles with the training or project leader as the learning expert.

Top to Bottom

Second, the fastest development happens when the process is driven from the top down rather than the bottom up. Having a project champion who has a strong financial interest in the outcome is a real game changer.

"Speed up by avoiding what slows you down"
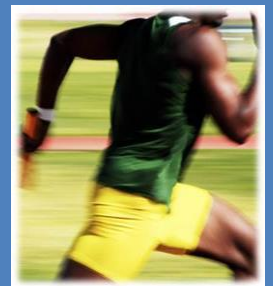
"Always find a project champion"

There is a big difference in having an instructional designer asking the sales manager to review a document when he or she has time versus the Executive Vice President of Sales asking others to do the same thing. A great project champions can drive timelines, remove obstacles and add resources if needed.

Third, be very specific about what you want reviewers to look for and don't leave it open ended. Tell them that you want them to verify that the content is correct and complete. Is everything there and if so, is it right. Explain that the biggest test of whether or not it's the right way to train it will come from putting it in front of the target audience.

Some of the issues in this first point are out of the direct control of the instructional designer and require strong leadership from the training manager or higher. However, the designer needs to know when and who to ask for help. If a project isn't moving along, this is the first place to look.

Avoid the "Blank Sheet of Paper"

The next big culprit of slow development is the "blank sheet of paper." Anything that is 100% new takes a very long time to develop. There is a lot of time wasted just staring at a blank computer screen. When you develop a lot of training over the years, you develop a big stockpile of materials, ideas, and activities that can be reused either as is or with a quick a face lift. Every instructor led session always has two units that can be inserted at the start of any design. Unit 1 is called Welcome and Introduction. In this unit, there are always these elements:

- Welcome students
- Introductions of the facilitator and students
- Review of objectives and agenda
- Review of housekeeping rules

This unit usually takes between 30 an 45 minutes, depending on the size of the class. There is little value in spending a lot of time on designing this unit, just modify one you've done in the past and like. The next unit is either a Wrap Up or Summary Unit. It's the last thing done at the end of the day and brings closure to the session. It includes these elements:
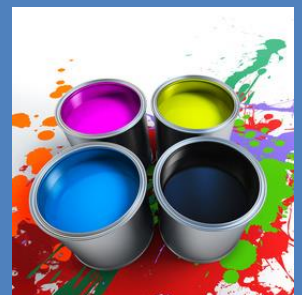
- Review of key concepts
- Action plan for next steps
- Course certificates
- Celebration

Again, pick something you like and repeat it. What happens over time is that students expect these units and will know what to do. It makes them go even faster.
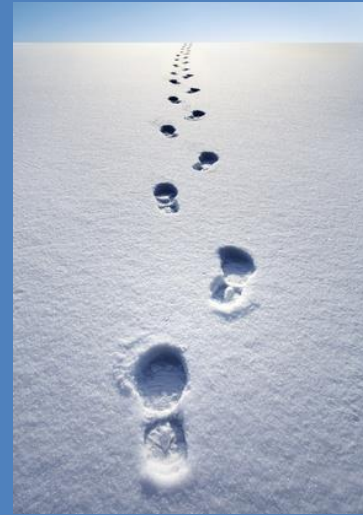
Pre-Made Decisions

Now that we have two units already written, we can then take a basic course outline and rely our stockpile of games, activities, case studies and role plays bring the outline to life. For example, a lot of interactions, such as a sales call or a coaching session, will require practice. I have a stockpile of 6 different ways to do role plays. I mix them up to keep things interesting, but I've already written directions. I just have to add the content.

The final part of avoiding the blank sheet of paper is to rely on pre-made decisions. There are a lot of things you don't need to decide for each and every program. Some of it is very simple and easy to do. For example, you can decide on the following and turn them into templates:

- Type style and fonts
- Headlines and subheads
- Bullets
- Margins
- Writing style
- Headers and footers
- Page numbering
- Table of contents

You can also decide what's going to be included in every design document, student guide, leader's guide and PowerPoints. This includes:

- Elapsed time or running time
- Objectives
- Title pages
- Pictures
- Hyperlinks

The goal is to do it once and make it the standard. For example, you can write any document in first, second or third person. Doesn't really make a big difference, pick one and use it over and over. The documents will look better and you will get better at producing them.

Another type of pre-made decision that will really speed things up is to decide on your approach to training. For example, if you believe that people learn by doing, then make it apparent in the training. Plug in a "doing" activity. If you believe in learning by discovery, use that approach each time. A key part of this is to be certain of your own learning principles and use them.

"Find out what you believe is really true about learning."

"Some decisions only need to be made once."

Repeatable Process

The final key piece that slows things done is the lack of a repeatable process. There are a lot of design models from ADDIE to SAM. You can also design your own. The most important thing is that you have a model and then follow it. You should never be wasting time thinking about what to do next. Once you have a model, you can then identify all of the deliverables and put them into a template. Deliverables might include:

- Proposals
- Needs analysis
- Research report
- Design documents
- Leader's guide
- Student guide
- Evaluations
- Action plans

When you build your stockpile of finished documents, you will have more that you can simply rearrange, customize or cut and paste. For example, when you're working on your tenth sales training program, you should have a good list of research questions to ask. Start with that list and then edit it. One of the things you can do when you have a defined process is to work on process improvement. Map out your process and then look for anything that slows the process down. For example, you might have a review point in the process that always bogs down. Consider modifying, rearranging or eliminating that step. Look for places when you might be missing a deliverable and consider making a new template.

What we've looked at in this whitepaper are just some of the ways to speed up the development of instructor led training. Many of these ideas can be applied to types of training such as elearning. In summary, what you want to do is take on projects that can be done quickly and build the support to make them happen. You want to avoid staring at a blank piece of paper by reusing what you know works and have a clear process mapped to good templates. Finally, you need to decide what you really believe is true about learning and then follow those principles.

About the Author
Steve Rosenbaum is president of Learning Paths International and the Author of Learning Paths: How to Increase Profits by Reducing Time to Proficiency. He is also a contributor to the Trainer's Portable Mentor and The Field Guide to the 6Ds. Steve has spent more than 30 years designing and development training for many of America's leading companies across industries and job functions. Steve also consults with learning leaders on how to develop their staffs and speed up the development process.

"Finding a process enables process improvement"