

# Working in training and development

**Ross Pearce**

*Editor's note: Good principals are developers of other people. During their careers they amass a wealth of experience and expertise which is often very transferrable to other contexts. In this contribution Ross Pearce reflects on his experience of training in the private sector.*

When I retired from NSW DET at the age of 55 after 12 years as a NSW secondary principal, I was keen to do some part-time work. Having spent many of my years at DET involved in training and development; including a couple of years in the Training and Development Directorate and three years as a regional Staff Development Consultant; I decided to try my hand as a trainer in the private sector.

After making some initial inquiries, I was told I would need to gain a Cert IV in Training and Development to have any chance of gaining employment as a trainer. So, in 2006, after paying over \$1500, I attended a two week training course with a private provider, completed a number of assignments and attained my Cert IV. I then searched the internet for training jobs.

The interview process was quite extensive. I initially attended an information evening (with about 30 other hopefuls), was given an informal interview and was then invited back a week later to do a 3 minute presentation and an interview in front of about 10 other short-listed applicants. Following the next cull, I had to attend a half hour interview before a panel of two. About a week later I was further interviewed by phone before being offered a part-time position three days a week. I was one of only two successful candidates from the original pool of 30 applicants.

When I joined this company in 2006, they were employing about 12 IT trainers and four professional development trainers, of whom I was one. The courses I delivered were for either a whole day (9am to 5pm) or two days (usually) and had up to 16 participants from the corporate sector, small businesses, non-government agencies and sometimes government departments. The courses included topics like Leadership, Communication Skills, Business Writing, Project Management, Time Management, Managing Difficult Situations, Presentation Skills and Resilience. The courses were conducted at either the training company's office in the CBD or on the client's site.

Initially I was given a day in work time to prepare for each new course. This preparation involved reading through a participant workbook (approximately 100 pages), finalising a PowerPoint presentation and my own session outline which included activities and their timing for each segment of content. The emphasis of the courses was interactive with active involvement of the participants in discussion, group work, role plays and other activities. In contrast, IT trainers conveyed a lot of information through demonstration and then had participants practise the skills they were learning on computers they provided.

I loved the preparation and research into different topics and I loved presenting the courses. I learnt quickly that people were not interested in my school experience but were very interested in my managerial experience and how I handled difficult situations and people. At the end of each course participants would evaluate their training experience and it was my company's expectation that you averaged an approval rating of over 90% if you wished to be retained in your position.

I was very fortunate that there was terrific camaraderie among the trainers in my company (compared to other training companies where trainers were basically on their own) and my own professional development was enhanced by observing colleagues in their training rooms and stimulating team

discussions and workshops. Once I had completed my own Diploma of Frontline Management I delivered this course to various client groups usually a day a week over a 10 week period.

During my 10 years as a professional development trainer I observed many changes in the industry. Whenever, there was a downturn in the economy, budgets for external training were one of the first things to be cut by companies. This meant that the number of permanent trainers in my company was reduced by about 60% over the 10 year period. Client companies would sometimes use internal personnel for training who were often very ineffective or they would simply cut all training except for mandatory topics like OH&S.

Employment of contract trainers (compared to permanent part-time ones) became far more flexible and attractive to training companies. While contract trainers are paid more, their volume of work is uncertain and subject to the vicissitudes of the economy. Contract trainers have to produce all their own training materials including participants' workbooks and pay their own insurance (e.g. public liability) and superannuation. I also observed training companies struggle with cashflow problems as many of their clients (including the big banks) did not pay their bills on time. This inevitably resulted in staff losses, sometimes delays in being paid and loss of morale.

One of the most significant changes in the learning and development industry has been that face-to-face training has been replaced in many instances by online training or blended training which is obviously much cheaper to deliver but nowhere near as effective or enjoyable.

### **Contributor details**

Ross Pearce, February 2017



Ross was Principal of Chester Hill High School from 1994 - 2004. Upon retirement, he worked part-time for 10 years in the private sector for a Training Company. More recently he has been delivering courses for the U3A.