Writing Learning Objectives for CPD Programs

Definition:
- A learning objective is a description of the skills, abilities and/or attitudes expected of the participant by the end of the program, session or learning activity.

NOTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTT...
“What would you like to teach your participants by the end of your session?”

Purpose of learning objectives
- They help you as a presenter or as a program planner, because they provide a focus and parameters around your presentation or program.
- At the same time, clear learning objectives provide a cognitive map for your participants.
- The learning objectives help the participants to organize information, assess their progress and support them in achieving those objectives.

The Essence
In essence, the learning objective should describe what the participant will be able to
- DO at the end of the session

Or
- DEMONSTRATE at the end of the session

Common Errors
The most common errors in writing learning objectives are:
1. Describing what the presenter will do, rather than what the participant will be able to do at the end of the session
2. Using a fuzzy, non-observable action verb, such as “understand”, “know”, “appreciate”, “value”, etc.
(See The Sinister Sixteen on the following page.)

Consider this scenario...
Just imagine it is the end of the lesson and you turn to a participant and say:
“Dr. X, could you please... (insert your learning objective)”
- What would you want to see your learners doing?
- Consider the needs assessment; what is needed to answer the challenge?
- If you did write “understand” or “appreciate”, etc., what did you really mean they would DO with that understanding or appreciation?
Resources

Bloom’s Taxonomy (below) is a useful tool for considering the level of cognitive challenge that you want your participants to reach.

Review the need for the topic, the need for the learning activity and reflect on the type of outcome that would best suit that need or fill that gap.

Revision of Bloom’s taxonomy of the cognitive domain following Anderson and Krathwohl (2001)

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Verbs for Bloom’s Taxonomy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Remember</th>
<th>Understand</th>
<th>Apply</th>
<th>Analyze</th>
<th>Evaluate</th>
<th>Create</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arrange</td>
<td>Classify</td>
<td>Calculate</td>
<td>Combine</td>
<td>Appraise</td>
<td>Arrange</td>
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<td>Contrast</td>
<td>Survey</td>
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<td>Criticize</td>
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Verbs that are Passive, Internal and/or Otherwise Unobservable

The most common verbs and phrases we see in learning outcomes are all unacceptable:

- Understand
- Appreciate
- Comprehend
- Grasp
- Know
- See
- Accept
- Have a knowledge of
- Be aware of
- Be conscious
- Learn
- Perceive
- Value
- Get
- Apprehend
- Be familiar with

All of these are internal. In other words, they aren’t public and can’t be observed.

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References


