

The **H S F** coefficient

Is *Training* related to *Real Life*?

честность - honesty
искренность - sincerity
откровенность - frankness
жизненная позиция - attitude to life

Overview

If you are not very fluent in English, please look up the words honesty, sincerity, frankness and attitude in a dictionary before reading this article.

Message

Training courses rather than "traditional" seminars can have an impact on the behaviour and "outlook on life" of participants. Training courses must therefore avoid creating a "greenhouse" atmosphere in which it is impossible for participants to be honest, sincere and frank. This atmosphere decreases the efficiency of training courses. Do not underestimate the role of the "unofficial" parts of seminars - parties, pubs, and other get-togethers.

Introduction

Let me introduce myself. I am the leader of a Russian NGO for international co-operation, projects and exchanges. I have been involved in international youth activities since 1988 and have seen a lot of different youth events in many different countries. I have also organised a good many international seminars, study trips, conferences and exchanges in Russia. Although I have never organised a training course myself, nor been in a training course preparation team, I have taken part in several European seminars and training courses.

Why do people lie?

What is the main difference between a training course and an ordinary seminar?

In my opinion, a traditional seminar (study trip, youth exchange) is mainly focused on the transfer or exchange of information (experience, skills) while a training course is mainly concerned with the transfer of attitudes (motivation, behaviour).

When you receive new information (experience, skills), you can either keep it to yourself or use it in your life. But when your attitude changes (towards any specific subject, or more generally towards life itself), so does your general outlook on life.

In other words, a training course can help to change your lifestyle, your behaviour, and even your values.

Is it true? Can a training course actually have an influence on the real life of its participants?

Some examples: At a conference of the Environment for Europe programme, a trainer from OSCE said: "I don't understand why you NGOs don't like your environment ministers. When they attend our training events, they know how to play the role of NGO leaders" ➤

by Andrey Ozharovskii



perfectly well. They understand your position perfectly. They are quite friendly towards NGOs." But the NGO representatives just laughed at this statement. Unfortunately, when the ministers return home, they are still the same "unforgettable bureaucrats". At that training event they received information, but their *attitude* to NGOs did not change... At the seminar they simply *demonstrated* "the right attitude", as the trainer expected.

ЧЕСТНОСТЬ

During another international training programme (LEAD), we had a comprehensive role game. We played the roles of different stake holders in negotiations and bargained for a "loan" for our "country". The aim of the game was consensus building, using a win-win strategy, etc. We were about 150 participants from 9 countries of 5 continents. Did we reach a consensus in this game? Yes. Did we succeed later on when we tried to draft a document about real problems of our real countries. No. Why? It is easy to find a solution in a game - but not in real life.

Another example: At one of the European Youth Centre's training courses we had a perfect discussion - in a seminar room - about national equality (all different - all equal...). But during the informal part of the course - at evening parties - nobody wanted to dance with a black girl. Did the attitude which the participants professed in the classroom differ from their real "everyday" attitude? Or did they just not like black girls?

Please ask yourself, have you been in situations like that? I mean, have you ever noticed that the things you say and the way you behave in a seminar room differ from your position and behaviour in everyday life? Even if you haven't, continue reading this article...

искренность

Greenhouse - the atmosphere of the classroom

A seminar or a training course often seem to have something of the atmosphere of a greenhouse. You are sitting in a comfortable room with a warm atmosphere and friendly, intelligent moderators and trainers. The

discussion is about your life, but at present your real life is somewhere far away. You know that lunch and dinner will be on time, and you are looking forward to the evening programme...

Just as a flower in a greenhouse differs from one in a field, so the behaviour at a seminar or training course differs from that in everyday life... You do not want to raise "impolite" questions for you are on your best behaviour. You decide it is better to say exactly what the trainer wants to hear...

I agree that in general it is easier to keep silent than to ask anything "impolite" or "ill-mannered". But we are talking about training for youth workers, who should be prepared to talk to people and be able to defend their position.

The challenge

For both trainees and trainers the challenge is to create an atmosphere of Honesty, Sincerity and Frankness (HSF). This is not easy. Only a really good trainer can achieve it.

Both trainer and trainees have to recognise the danger of "playing a game". Don't be afraid to show your real opinion, not the opinion which is expected of you. Don't lie.

There are many reasons, why trainers and trainees sometimes prefer to hide their real emotions and attitudes and to behave as ideal persons, and not as they behave in everyday life. In Coyote #0, Carol-Ann Morris described The Perfect Training Event. But isn't there is the danger that the Ideal Trainee may really be an accomplished liar, deceiver, conformist? Changing the attitudes of trainees is certainly not an easy thing to do. But the "Ideal Trainee" could easily *simulate* a change without any real change happening at all.

Something similar happens when an experienced person fills in an application form for an activity at the European Youth Centre. He or she knows the key words and right answers, and fills in the application as an Ideal Applicant, not as a real person.

The HSF coefficient (Honesty, Sincerity, Frankness)

I would like to suggest the introduction of a HSF coefficient as one of the indicators of the success of a training course.

When during the coffee break participants say "What an useless seminar" and in the seminar room the same people say: "Thanks to the organisers for a perfect seminar" - something is definitely wrong... It shows that the HSF coefficient of that seminar is quite low.

It is easy to evaluate an "information-orientated" seminar. You have acquired some new information (a formula, a poem, a computer programme) or you have not acquired anything new. But how are we to evaluate an "attitude-orientated" training course? How are we to know, if the attitude of trainees has changed?

Methods

Let us consider the following methods of increasing HSF.

Icebreaker exercises allow trainers and trainees to get to know each other in an informal way, to establish a degree of personal contact, which is an important precondition for being honest, sincere and frank in the seminar room.

Role games, theatre exercises and suchlike are aimed at overcoming the classroom situation. They create an informal atmosphere which allows participants to behave as in real life, not as in a seminar.

Rigorous discussions are another method, although they are more appropriate in long-term educational programmes. In training courses there is never enough time to go deeper into a subject.

Flashback groups are small discussion groups which meet at the end of each day where the participants can share their feelings and impressions. Flashback groups are specifically intended to increase the HSF of a seminar. In these groups, people can talk about their own

individual problems. But many participants consider even flashback groups as a part of the official "classroom" programme. I heard of a girl who was experiencing a degree of sexual harassment (not violent) from fellow trainees. She talked about it in her flashback group and her persecutors agreed that this was not a good situation. Do you think anything changed in "real life" afterwards? No, every night she had to look for protection from her admirers.

откровенность

A joke

A Russian trainer said that the success of a seminar could be described in terms of the "lipercmug" coefficient calculated by multiplying the number of litres of alcoholic beverages that participants consumed by the percentage volume of alcohol in these drinks and dividing it by the number of participants' mugs (i.e. faces).

O.K., this is about the usual stereotype that Russians are heavy drinkers. But the truth in this joke is that when you have a Russian-style alcohol party as a seminar evening programme, it is impossible to behave as in a classroom. And, quite often, seminar issues are discussed during these parties more frankly, sincerely and honestly than during the official part. So, our way of breaking out of the greenhouse atmosphere is to do it with a bottle!

So, as far as we Russians are concerned, the lipercmug coefficient increases that of HSF. I wonder if this works for other nations? Seriously, I would like to know whether the issue of HSF is important for other trainers and trainees? What do you do to solve this problem?

ЖИЗНЕННАЯ ПОЗИЦИЯ

My personal metnouns

As I said in the introduction, I do not run any trainings, but I do try to increase the HSF of the seminars I am running in my country. Last October, IDC organised an International Youth Environmental Working Camp in Novorossiysk, on the Black Sea coast. I did two simple things - I took an active part in "the night programme" - I stayed at the parties until 4-5 a.m. every morning, and on the first day of the seminar we organised a study visit to a local brewery. ►►

sincerity

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honesty



... and about
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(Brewing is a good issue to discuss environmental protection, water pollution, etc.) The closing ceremony took place in the Champagne museum in Abrau Durso.

So, my "flashback groups" took place during the night parties, when in an informal atmosphere participants could comment on the situation and problems. I hope that beer and champagne also helped to encourage unofficial communication, where anyone could say: "Hey, Andrey, what a stupid lecture you gave to us today!", or "I got so tired of digging with a shovel today, can't you find an easier job for me?"

A positive example

I find that there are too many negative messages in this article. I do not mean that I do not like the idea of European training courses. I think they are very important and that they have great potential.

At one event in the European Youth Centre there were two boys in the "Russian speaking group" from two Caucasus republics which were (frankly speaking) in a state of war (the republics, not the boys). One of the boys was 18 and had to go to the army two months later (he is probably there now). The two were not very friendly to each other. The future soldier even said once that his dream was to kill 3 or 4 guys of the hostile nation. Nothing strange - the official ideology of his country...

But they both participated in our evening programme (pubs, discos, etc.). Once, after a great party one boy did a great service to his "enemy" - by carrying him from a pub to the Youth Centre. You know, for the rest of the seminar, "the two gentlemen from the Caucasus" were together. I do not know if they really became friends, but I hope that since then neither of them has dreamt of killing boys of the other nation.

I do not know if this example proves the importance of *training courses or parties*. But it is about *changing the attitude* towards other nations. And about changing our behaviour in real life, not in the classroom.

Personal

I am not sure that the issue I wanted to raise in this article is important for other trainers and trainees. I have tried to indicate its importance with some examples. My sensitivity to the issue of Honesty, Sincerity, Frankness can probably be explained by my experience of living under communist rule. I graduated from secondary school at the time of the Soviet Union and I know all about lies and falsehood in the classroom. It was a great surprise for me to feel something similar at European training courses run today.

Let's be Honest, Sincere and Frank!

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