

A Trainer's Most Powerful Tool—Spaced Repetition

Spaced repetition is the precept that information must be delivered repeatedly over a period of time for retention to occur. This principle is widely used in the sales, advertising, education, and training disciplines.

Studies into human behavior tell us that an idea or concept presented without repetition is quickly forgotten. Present a concept to 100 people for the first time and after 24 hours, 25 people have forgotten it. After 48 hours, 50 people have forgotten it. After 4 days, 85 people have forgotten it. After only 16 days, 98 people have forgotten it! There is a powerful message in that statistic for trainers.

If your training participants are not retaining information, it may be that you are not presenting the concepts in a manner that facilitates long-term retention. If the participants



can't remember what you have taught them, they surely won't be able to apply it; and if that is the case, I dare to say that your training has been a big waste of time and money.

The trick is to design your curriculum so that the key concepts you want your participants to retain is presented at least six times over a period of time for maximum retention.

The repeated exposure works like this:

- At the first exposure a person may reject the concept because it conflicts with his preconceived ideas.
- At the second exposure the person resists; he now understands but can't accept it.
- By the third exposure there is partial acceptance; he agrees, but has reservations about its use.
- By the fourth exposure there is full acceptance; now we have paved the way for learning to begin.
- By the fifth exposure there is partial assimilation by trying out or using the idea or concept.
- By the sixth exposure there is full assimilation and the concept is integrated into the person's behavior.

The "spacing" part of the repetition works best when several hours or days separate the repeated exposures. When designing your training consider breaking down the curriculum into modules that can be easily presented over a period of time. Ensure that the key concepts are worked into each module for a minimum of six exposures by the end of the curriculum delivery for maximum retention.

By integrating spaced repetition into your training curriculum design, studies show that the retention factor jumps to 16 years instead of 16 days! That is truly the power of spaced repetition.