

# Teachable Moments Are Everywhere

By Susan Keith, Program Developer/CPI Global Professional Instructor

I'll be the first to admit it. I'm a training geek. I've been in the training and development field for over 15 years. I'm signed up for numerous topical online newsletters, subscribe to journals, and went so far as to earn my master's degree in adult education—instructional design. I have always been interested in how people learn. My mother wanted me to be a classroom teacher, but I really prefer working with adults.

What, you may be wondering, does this have to do with your practice as a Certified Instructor? I answer that by saying that the more aware we are of how people learn, and, as Instructors, how we support an ongoing learning process, makes all the difference in how well training “sticks” outside the classroom over the long term.

## Formal Versus Informal

I've been paying more attention to how to make training “stick,” or, more officially, how to promote training transfer, especially when reflecting on my experiences during sessions at the [2011 CPI International Instructors' Conference](#). One of the Conference keynote speakers, Tony Bingham, discussed social learning, especially in the realm of using electronic communication. He talked about using formats like Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, wikis, and internal blogs, to name a few. In some ways, I felt like he was speaking about a foreign culture in a foreign language. I've been slow to adopt and use most of these new media formats. The focus of this article is not necessarily to promote more use of technology for learning purposes in the workplace, but to look at how to incorporate a fuller continuum of learning and sharing to best fit everyone's needs and most effectively maintain an ongoing training/learning process.

*I am always ready to learn although I do not always like being taught.*

**Winston Churchill**

Workplace learning takes many forms, some formal and some not. What's the difference?

Formal learning is organized and structured, and has learning objectives. From the learner's standpoint, it is always intentional. The learner's specific objective is to gain knowledge, skills, and/or competencies. This is where our primary attention as Instructors is focused. Think initial *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*<sup>®</sup> training and formal refresher courses.

Informal learning is less organized and is more self-directed, may not have set objectives in terms of learning outcomes, and is less intentional from the learner's standpoint. It is often referred to as learning by experience, or just as experience. Think day-to-day work or life experience. For example, in a conversation with a coworker, I learn that Certified Instructors can watch eRefreshers for free at [crisisprevention.com](#). Or, by observing a coworker successfully using a limit-setting strategy, I gain confidence to try the strategy myself.

What examples of informal learning come to mind when you think more specifically about work experience? What have you learned? What have you taught/shared?

In between these is nonformal (semi-structured) learning, which can be somewhat organized and can have learning objectives set by the leader or by the participants. Think of an organized, planned review of key *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*<sup>®</sup> program concepts, crisis response team drills, or small group discussions during a formal training.

In an article titled "[Informal Learning in the Workplace](#)," Megan Le Clus states, "Learning in the workplace represents a variety of strategies and perspectives that enable coworkers to learn as part of their everyday experiences at work. Learning in the workplace can be formal learning planned by the organization . . . it can also be informal learning that is unintentional and results from interaction with other coworkers."

In a [blog post](#), performance consultant Tom Gram discusses "Leveraging the Full Learning Continuum." If we use this perspective and think about learning as a continuum from formal to informal, we can better plan for learning opportunities for our staff at all points of the Training Process wheel. I would even propose that many of these opportunities occur outside of the formal classroom learning experience.

## **Are We Paying Attention?**

### **The Preview**

How can we prepare our participants for learning (informally) prior to the formal training experience?

Learners attend training from many different perspectives. As adult learners, however, we tend to want answers to some common questions. What is this about? Why is this important to me? Why do I need to know this? How will this help me?

Basically, what's in it for me, and how is this training going to make my job easier? First, consider providing answers to these questions when announcing a training event to your staff. This can be shared by including program objectives, the program philosophy, and even success stories you can gather from staff who have already attended training. Think about including a link to [crisisprevention.com](http://crisisprevention.com), and encourage visitation. This information can minimize anxieties and resistance staff may have about attending training.

Next, pose questions to your staff. Begin planting seeds before your program begins. For example:

- What are the main challenges you face in this area?
- What would make the biggest difference in the way you support individuals?
- How could this information have an impact on your work?
- What are the main questions you have about this?
- What one thing do you really want to get from this training?

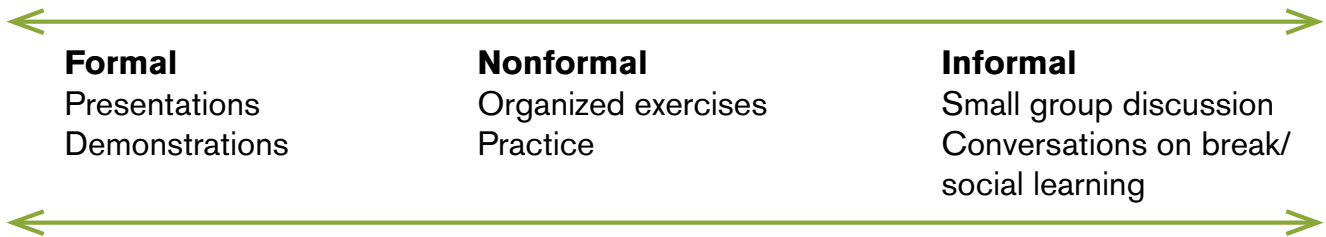
*How will you share this with your staff? Email? Intranet? SharePoint? An old-fashioned poster-type announcement? Flyers in staff mailboxes? What is the most effective way to motivate self-directed learning in advance?*

### **The Main Event**

Here is where many Instructors are most comfortable. The classroom is our domain, and is a formal, Instructor-led experience. Our programs could be viewed as a 12-act play—the pre-test, Units I–X, and the post-test/evaluation. We have our manuals, Leader's Guides, and props, and set the stage by arranging the training environment. (What does this look like? Is it conducive to learning?)

What kind of a trainer are you? Are you the more formal trainer for whom everything is well orchestrated according to your designed training plan? Or, are you a more relaxed trainer who follows the course outline, but encourages participants to engage in discussions about the course content and likes to try different approaches on occasion? Maybe you answer these questions differently depending on whether you're teaching an initial or a

refresher training. While both are formal learning settings, informal learning will also happen with or without our encouragement. Let's pay attention to how we can use that to provide a richer experience for everyone. We use a continuum of teaching strategies to assist in the learning process during a formal training. For example:



In a training program, participants learn as much from each other as they do from the content and/or the Instructor. Social learning theory explains how people learn new behaviors, values, and attitudes. This learning is about informally sharing experience and expertise with peers, and learning from others. Think about when social learning occurs in a formal training. Would it be beneficial to create additional opportunities for this to happen?

Social learning is also happening more frequently through the use of social media. I mentioned earlier that I'm a late adopter of technology in the social arena. I'm still uncomfortable when I see participants using their mobile devices in my training programs. However, as Tony Bingham very clearly illustrated in his keynote address at our 2011 Conference, we may be missing some excellent opportunities for promoting an ongoing Training Process if we dismiss social media.

### Post-Training Discussion

You've successfully completed another formal *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*<sup>®</sup> training program! How do you keep the learning process (transfer of training) going? The [Training Process](#) wheel illustrates a number of nonformal strategies that many Certified Instructors use to promote training transfer on a regular basis. I'd like to challenge you to think about how you can expand on the use of these strategies, and add more opportunities for learning across the continuum.



Can you incorporate discussion threads on your organization's intranet? If you use LinkedIn with colleagues, continue discussions about crisis intervention there. What about organizing small group conversations during staff meetings with questions developed by the Certified Instructor?

Also, consider what informal and nonformal learning opportunities are available to you as a Certified Instructor that can assist in improving your training practice. What can you learn to enhance your next program? How can you share this information with your co-trainers? When is the last time you visited [crisisprevention.com](http://crisisprevention.com) and explored the Training Center or contributed to a discussion in the Instructor Community? [Click here](#) for a sample of a learning transfer template that you and your staff can use to create potential learning plans.

I encourage you to do your own research. Hopefully you've learned a few things from this article and you will continue to explore on your own.

Teachable moments are everywhere.

Every day, be conscious and be present. Complete the following statements:

Today I learned \_\_\_\_\_.

Today I taught/shared \_\_\_\_\_.

On the following page is a template that may be helpful in assessing learning transfer.

## References/Resources

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*You learn something every day if you pay attention.*

**Ray LeBlond**



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## Learning Transfer Template

1. Briefly describe the training/educational program you recently attended.
2. Use the chart below to specify how you will apply what you learned.
3. Review this plan with at least one person and make appropriate changes.

### Individual Action Plan

|  |  |
|--|--|
| List knowledge, skills, and attitudes learned ( <i>Care, Welfare, Safety, and Security</i> <sup>SM</sup> ).  |  |
| Describe when, where, and how you want to apply what you have learned.   |  |
| List the names of people who could offer assistance/support.   |  |
| What other resources could be helpful? How will you determine your success at using the knowledge, skills, and attitudes? ( <i>Care, Welfare, Safety, and Security</i> <sup>SM</sup> ) |  |
| Specify a time frame.  |  |