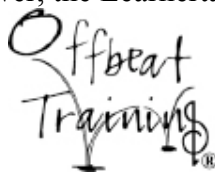


## Stage the Surroundings

By Lenn Millbower, the Learnertainment™ Trainer



Over the last two months, I began a series of articles based on the eight principles of Learnertainment™ and the action steps suggested by each. Those eight are:

- Emotion creates memory – Evoke Emotion
- Laughter produces positive energy – Harness Humor
- Visuals aid retention – Present with Props
- Suggestions guide outcomes – Make it Magical
- Auditory signals trump visuals – Mix in Music
- Multiple perspectives deepen meaning – Layer Learning
- The performance sends a message – Stage the Surroundings
- The performer sends a message – Perfect the Performance

This month I continue focusing on one principle and its corresponding action step with an examination of Learnertainment™ Principle Seven, The Performance Sends a Message and the action step, Stage the Surroundings.

### Staged Environments

There is magic in every illusion show, but it's not where you expect to see it. The real magic can be found in the extraordinary efforts magicians take to control their surroundings. By controlling their environment magicians imply control over nature and by inference, the gift of supernatural powers. Through this implication, they influence the spectator.

The same dynamic applies to other environments. Just as a restaurant's dirty floor suggests an unsanitary kitchen and a messy waiting room implies a lackadaisical doctor, a cluttered classroom suggests a lack of trainer focus. It also represents a wasted learning opportunity. Every element in the classroom either adds to and supports the learning or distracts from and negates it.

To create this orchestrated experience, you should think of your classroom as your stage. In fact, the origin of the word "stage" can be found in the Vulgar Latin word, "staticum," meaning "a standing place." The classroom is your standing place. It is your "theater-in-the-round" and the following elements of your surroundings should be staged.

**The Lobby** –The first impression presented to your trainees as they enter your learning environment will establish or diminish the credibility of you and your instruction. As they enter, they should be enticed into an exciting exploration of learning. The hallway leading to the training room should be clean and orderly, free of trash and junk, and fresh smelling.

**The Entryway** – The classroom door should be open invitation. Once the participants walk through the doorway, the trainer should be waiting, personally serving as a welcoming presence, not covered in sweat while scrambling to set up. As the trainees look past the trainer, and into the

room, the environment should beckon them forward. If it is morning, the smell of fresh coffee should embrace them. Music should comfort their ears. The room should be alive with things to touch. In short, the learning should begin the moment the learners enter the classroom.

**The Seating** – The seating is the element of the classroom that the attendees physically touch. And yet, it receives little attention from trainers. You may not have control over the seating and tables that your trainees must use, but you can insure that they are clean and in good working order. If there are grease marks or food stains left over from a prior group, clean it up.

**The Platform** – Consider the area you intend to stand in and communicate from. When people look past you, will they see supportive materials or junk? Will your clothes blend into, or clash with, the background? Are electrical cables taped down or otherwise out of the way? Have you removed all non-supporting messages from your working area?

**The Lighting** – Just as theatrical lighting establishes a mood and tone, the classroom lighting will aid or distract from learning. The fact is that many conference rooms, especially in supposedly state of the art facilities have poorly designed lighting schemes. Often, the stage area is placed with little to no attention to lighting, resulting in an instructor whose face is in shadows cast by ceiling lighting. If you can change the location of your platform, place it where the lighting will pick up your face.

**The Scenery** – Few trainers would argue that they have too much time with their trainees and yet do not take advantage of every teachable moment, including the moments when a trainee looks away from the trainer. If the participant who looks away sees a pile of junk, the value of the instruction has been unintentionally trashed. The classroom should be alive with visual stimuli that support key learning points. The room should be set with food for the eyes.

**The Sensory Stimulates** – Trainees absorb information through all their senses, not just sight. The following should also be considered:

- **Touch:** Items that relate to the learning without distracting from the instruction should be placed on the tables for trainees to touch during moments of tension. In addition, the room temperature should be comfortable; neither warm or cold, but comfortably cool. Studies have shown that the optimum temperature ranges between 66 and 72 degrees, but slightly on the cool side.
- **Smell:** The classroom should give forth an attractive odor. A foul smell distracts attention. The opposite is also true. A pleasant odor aids learning. The smell of peppermint or lemon has been proven to enhance productivity and coffee can warm an early morning learning room.
- **Taste:** For centuries, people have regarded the breaking of bread as an important communal rite. When people eat together, they feel a sense of belonging. Although learning room feasts are unnecessary and can be financially prohibitive, providing basics like coffee, tea, sodas, candies, popcorn, and other light snacks increase the sense of belonging as participants engage their taste buds and share community.

It's yours. Own it!

Your classroom will be your home for the duration of the session. Visit it beforehand. See it through your trainees' eyes. Sit in their seats. Pick up the mood of the room. Walk to and from the platform from as many angles as possible. Become one with it. In the eyes of your learners, the room is an extension of you. Stage your surroundings.

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