

Training with a Beat

By Lenn Millbower



In *Training With A Beat: The Teaching Power of Music* (Stylus Publishing, 2000), I discussed the effective usage of music during learning events. Although a complete description of these points is not possible in this short article, here are some helpful generalizations.

Music establishes a positive environment

People are often uncomfortable entering the learning environment. Learning requires admitting knowledge gaps, in front of strangers, in an unfamiliar room, to facilitators not yet met. No wonder learners fear learning. Music appeals to attendee emotions and music disarms most anti-learning defenses. Participants who walk into your classroom, and immediately feel comfortable because of the music you play, will be ready to listen.

Music minimizes negative conditions surrounding a subject

People react negatively to some subjects. Most trainers have experienced the uncomfortable situation of participants refusing to cooperate due to circumstances beyond the trainer's control. By reaching past the brain's intellectual defenses, music transcends intellectual blocking and engages your participants.

Music creates a metaphor for the task to be learned

Metaphors are created when one item is compared to another in such a way as to make the concept of the first item more understandable. Adults have accumulated a depth of experience that serves as a framework for learning, and metaphors tap into that reservoir. Through the lyrics of an appropriately selected song, music serves as a metaphor for the subject being taught.

Music provides background ambiance

Background noise can distract learners from the task at hand. By camouflaging ambient noise, music aids reflection. Background music can be especially effective during discussions and reflection periods. It creates a sense of privacy for small group discussion, making conversations more satisfying, and encouraging participants to say what they feel.

Music assists with repeated tasks

From boat rowing, to fruit picking, to assembly line work, to jogging, people throughout the world synchronize music with repetitive movements. Any activity with a timed sequence can be set to music. Once consistency has been established, accelerating the musical tempo can help your participants gain speed as their skills grow.

Music aids memorization

When tied together, words and music engage a larger portion of your participants' brainpower. Most children learn their alphabet by singing the letters. Adults have forgotten this effective tool. By tying your key points to a song, your participants may retain your message.

Music enhances reviews

Slow Baroque or early Classical period music, pulsing at a rate parallel to that of the human heart, around 60 to 80 beats per minute, played during reviews helps decrease brain activity while creating a relaxed state of awareness. This technique is effective prior to quizzes, during recaps, as a refresher, and during that supposedly sleepy time after lunch when the body is tired but the mind is alert.

Music frames games and activities

Any learning activity can be tied to appropriate musical themes. For example, game show activities allow trainers to test participant comprehension in a non-threatening manner. Themed music frames such activities, making them less test-like and more enjoyable. My own CD, *Do You Want to Learn with Music* provides an excellent source for royalty-free game show themed music.

Music changes energy levels

Music can change the dynamic of your learning environment by encouraging your participants to move about, relax, calm down, or become motivated depending on your needs.

Music fosters creativity

Brainstorming sessions are an ideal place to use music, allowing your participants to develop and link material in connecting applications. Music that helps your participants relax will focus their creative abilities.

Music provides closure

The completion of any session is a cause for celebration. Something important has been accomplished. Music is an ideal companion for these moments. It makes the closure more notable and celebratory.

Finally, music is not a substitute for effective training, but it does add emotional substance to any training. Use it and your participants will sing your praises. For more detail about this topic, please refer to *Training with A Beat: The Teaching Power of Music*.

Lenn Millbower is the author of the book, *Training with a Beat: The Teaching Power of Music* and the composer-arranger of *Do You Want To Learn With Music: Game Show Themes for Trainers*, a best selling CD of royalty free music designed for learning environments, and the forthcoming book *Show Biz Training* (AMACOM, 2003). This article was reproduced with permission of the publisher, Stylus Publishing, Sterling, VA, www.styluspub.com. To contact Lenn Millbower, please visit www.offbeattraining.com.