

Adding the “Fun” Factor to In-House CLE

By:

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Roger Curlin is the Professional Development Manager for Carlton Fields and is admitted to practice law in the State of Florida. A Florida native, he formerly practiced law in Sarasota, Florida for both the County and the firm of Walters, Levine, Brown, Klingensmith & Thomison. He served three years as the Program Attorney for CLE at Stetson University College of Law, followed by two years as the Program Manager for Training and Development at Holland & Knight. His business experience includes serving as an account executive at an international publication company, owning his own consulting business, and serving as a general manager in the food/beverage industry.

Roger holds a B.S. degree from the University of Florida and a J.D. degree from Stetson University College of Law (Gulfport, FL). He is a member of the Florida Bar and is a very active member of ACLEA, for which he has served previously as Co-Chair of the Marketing SIG, Co-Chair of the Las Vegas Planning Committee, and 5-year member of the Exhibitor/Sponsor Committee. Roger is currently serving his fourth year on the Executive Committee, and has become involved in both the Executive Leadership and In-House Committees. He is active in community service, focusing particularly on mentoring underprivileged youth, and enjoys competition billiards, cards, bowling, and reading. Interestingly, Roger is one of the only people to survive an ACLEA encounter with the lethal bark scorpion.



Adding the “Fun” Factor to In-House CLE

Today's partners, associates, and legal professionals are facing a wide-variety of changes and challenges. It's a very tense atmosphere in many law firms with hours down, morale lower, and intensity on client building. This session will show PD professionals ways to take their In-House CLE and Training and give attorneys and professionals a breath of fresh air and fun during training time. Ideas will include injecting music, games, interaction, and frivolity into all types of programs. Not only the what, and the why, but also the "how" to convince conservative speakers, planners, and firm leadership that it's the right thing to do.

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* I apologize in advance for anyone who suffers from Coulrophobia (an abnormal or exaggerated fear of clowns.) I have recently learned of this phobia, and while only a small portion of folks are afflicted, I did not mean to cause alarm for those impacted with the photo on the top of the materials. My only intent was to capture a sense of fun and frivolity, which ensues for most folks when they see a very large person dressed up as a clown on a very tiny bike.

These materials very closely follow my presentation, and are meant to memorialize many of my points so folks that miss my presentation benefit, and folks at my presentation don't have to write like fiends to get down everything they like.

The Why

As alluded to in my introductory description of this presentation, we are all in very stressful times. The economic doldrums we are experiencing have greatly influenced the legal world, with all-time recent highs in attorney lay-offs, and a flat-line in attorney and legal staff compensation (after steady increases of 5% or more for decades). The only other two modern industries (besides legal) to see such a steep sustained growth prior to the economic collapse were healthcare and education (both of which continue to see advancing rates).

As of 2011, we will be starting the 4th year of the economic crisis (which began in 2008). That is a long time to be in a recession, especially one of this magnitude. Most companies and organizations have taken the position of lay-offs, and squeezing profits from higher productivity and decreases in such necessary areas as training, benefits, and retreats. While this philosophy has resulted in keeping profits (in some cases quite large) stable for companies, worker productivity has begun to fall due to over-exertion.

With morale at low levels in many organizations, it is important to squeeze fun back into the work life wherever possible. It is also safe to say that by providing some fun and frivolity, not only would training give the benefit of lightening the day for many, but also leads to increased attention, learning, and 'repeat business.' This form of educational entertainment is known as edutainment (a term that was used by Disney in the 40's and has many proponents in adult learning.)

Engagement

Why do you think so many jurisdictional MCLE rules require interactivity? (Besides just copying each other's rules ... the more you interact with an audience the better your chance of them learning.) An engaged audience is better focused and is thinking (as opposed to passively awaiting the knowledge to be magically poured into their head.)

Better Retention

Along the lines of engaged, focused, and thinking – there are numerous devices that make learning more enjoyable and it has also been scientifically proven that information is better retained by an interested audience. Moreover, many edutainment methods incorporate learning tools that assist in retention (images, color, sound, repetition, writing, demonstrations, etc...)

Repeat Business

Key to success at in-house training is having your audience come back to future training (and not just for the outstanding lunch you serve – if it didn't get cut in the budget.) Having your programs fun, interactive learning experiences only increases the chance that attorneys will come again and 'tell their friends.' There are numerous instances of where our presenters did exciting programs for either clients or internally and the buzz was created that built anticipation for the next time that group is scheduled to present. Idea is to build an Edutainment experience that brands your entire departments training, not just a few speakers who embrace the methodology.

The What

What are some of the actual things we can do to add a fun factor into an in-house CLE? For preparation, think of these in three unique stages: Before, During, and After. Obviously because we deliver CLE/training in multitude of formats – live, online, videoconference, phone etc – not everything is going to work in each setting. This listing is designed to stimulate your thinking and maybe give you some great foundational pieces to liven up your programs.

Before (Scene Setters)

- Music – has the unique ability to set the mood for an audience before a program even begins (think opening musical score for a movie). In majority of law firm presentations, it's "drop a pin" quiet in the minutes before a program begins - doesn't exactly get folks in mood to be engaged.
 - Suggestions involve some up tempo crowd pleasers like ABBA (actually had an ACLEA co-presenter look askew at me because they didn't like ABBA – only one so far...); I used this to open the morning with great success at several all day programs where stamina was key.
 - You can choose the mood to fit topic/speaker – Classical, Enya, Seasonal, etc... I also recommend 'Classical Crossover' artists such as G4 (look them up – great sound and somewhat conservative).
- Table toys - pipecleaners, bendy toys, mnemonic devices, etc.
 - Adult learning techniques indicate 25% of attendees learn better when they have something to fiddle with. Suggestion – keep it simple, you want them focused on the presentation, not trying to puzzle out a game or contraption.
 - I have used pipecleaners successfully on many occasions: I tell folks why the pipecleaners are there (to let folks who enjoy learning with tactile devices focus). Sometimes I give them tasks – "shape the pipecleaners to reflect something that is bothering you back in your shop." (One person made an infinity symbol!!)
- Name Badges - ideas: bio on badge, invent names – ex: ask people to create a Roller Derby Name, decorations & stickers & write-your own.
 - Brief Bio on badge allows folks to give piece of conversation info – great when you have large gathering of attorneys who may not know each other (example retreats).

- Roller Derby names – let folks play a bit by inventing a name they would use if they played roller derby: ex: Robin Banks or Babe Ruthless for fans of the movie *Whip It*.
- Have blank badges with markers, stickers, etc – let folks design their own.
- PPT title slide or slide show – fun/educational. Have great opening slide that is provocative, or series of cycling slides w/ same. Can be tied to presentation or not. Think – what’s going to make folks laugh/think/smile?
- Materials may be boring – but packaging doesn’t have to be. (think of fun envelope or title page.)
- Get Outside the Box!
- “Casual CLE” – get firm to let folks who come to CLE on Fridays dress in jeans/casual.
- Print ‘tickets’ or invitations for folks to attend session and find a volunteer to collect tickets and give them something fun at door before they take a seat.

During (Reinvigorators – Red Bull moments)

- PicturePoint - using pictures and headlines in place of heavy text (Microsoft has 100’s of thousands of free art available). Craft the PPT with images and headers that encapsulate the presenters points and then speak to those points. It’s okay to mix in demonstrative or text slide if needed (but make that the exception.) If there are numerous text-heavy moments necessary in the teaching, put those into a handout.
- War Stories – these ROCK! Get speakers thinking about these early on. Encourage them to vet the stories with colleagues to make sure they are appropriate and reinforce a point.
- Give-aways – these ROCK! (But don’t overdue it, and make sure it’s not anything of substance (iPod) because folks that don’t get chance to ‘win’ one get miffed.)
 - Sometimes its good to have enough for everyone that you can give at end of session to thank them as audience.
 - It’s okay if you have videoconference group if they are small (you can always interoffice them something).
- Table questions
 - Designed to have small group table chats around a topical question/anecdote from the program.
 - Have these questions prepared ahead of time and sealed in an envelope that tables open at predetermined time in the program for 5-minute chair chat.
 - Blank question forms that folks can fill-out and pass up for presenter (let’s shy folks get involved).
 - Describe to audience what these are for and have staff collect them at predetermined point or let audience pass to front of room.
- Maybe offer prize for best question (that will get folks thinking). Example – “We want this presentation today to be very interactive, so we are giving a special prize to whoever poses the best question to today’s presenter.”
- Responders/Paddles – audience polling (always perks folks up).
 - Webcasts can use software polling window tools.

- Paddles are mini-dry erase boards with handles (any number of companies sell these); very inexpensive reusable old-school polling method.
- Change up expectations at meal/snack times (upgrade where possible).
 - Example: if you group usually has sandwiches, upgrade to a chaffing-dish catered meal.
 - Example: do a breakfast CLE w/build your own yogurt bar + donuts and bagels (change of pace over typical lunch time).
 - Example: “Tea & CLE” – afternoon program with Tea and noshes.
- Just Plain Fun(ny): Have a Magic 8-Ball with the speaker and before they answer any question logically, have them give the answer from the Magic 8-Ball. (I do not encourage this method with one’s significant other.)
- PPT-game show (ex: Jeopardy, Family Feud, Million Dollar Pyramid etc..) –
 - Great free and small-price software that easily templates these.
 - We have used for clients and internally.
 - **Really** gets audience involved.
- Video Clips. Think best You Tube moments. You may need copyright permission and IT folks at your organization to make these happen effectively.
- Take them on an Internet tour of a favorite (uncommon sites) = example - www.despair.com for fun; or site’s with great resource on the topic (many in-house rooms have internet connectivity).

After (Remembrances)

- Give-aways: Cool desk ‘tools’ such as paperweights, stress-balls, note clips, etc.
 - Lots of companies make these and can personalize to your firm, Practice Group, or department. At Holland & Knight developed tag line: “Learn More. Stress Less.” For the PD department and put these on stress balls.
- Jazz the evaluation up (w/ speaker’s permission) – use graphics, fun terms (Speaker Scale 5-1: Rocking, Jazzy, A’ight, Lame, Sucked).
- Movie passes for everyone that attended (or maybe think about holding at Movie Theatre and letting everyone see matinee after?)
- Give-aways: Door Sign’s with topic checklist on one side and fun ‘do not disturb’ sign on the other.
- Give-aways: Lollipops (think dentist).
- Play departure music.
- Play departure video (see jib-jab for free fun examples).
- Play departure credits (easy to design in PPT slide show with fun images, pictures of Partners, etc... with quotes or famous sayings.)
- Have happy-hour after (in room or nearby if you can).

The How (to squeeze more fun into presentations)

Oftentimes you have to convince leadership, presenters, audience, and organizational culture that it’s okay to have fun and learn at same time. Hopefully to this point in the materials I have convinced you of the why and what, but all will be for naught if you cannot convince the gatekeepers to loosen up and have some fun.

Eleven ways to convince them to “Leave the Lame CLE Behind”

- 1) Use your “Why” research. Grab thoughts from these materials, plus pull additional research from internet and the numerous books on this topic. Caveat – avoid overselling as they will begin to look at you askew.
- 2) Keeping up with the Jones’s (Or Jones Day’s)...use the names of other reputable firms/organizations in your area that are successfully using FUN in their CLE. (Feel free to use Carlton Fields (ranked #14 in Vault’s latest survey) – as we do some pretty fun stuff.)
- 3) Favorite Film – ask them to think of their favorite film and ask them how much they remember about it....: Inevitably they will say A LOT (lesson: we retain more when engaged/entertained).
- 4) Give me a break – attorneys deserve a break, laugh, smile, to have fun – very stressed – this reinvigorates them, and its a cheap form of stress relief. (Massages typically run \$100 an hour.)
- 5) Partners like labels – explain the concept as a phenomenon known in scientific/educational circles as Edutainment, and they may be more likely to let you begin to infuse some of this into the training.
- 6) Adding fun increases likelihood attorneys will come to training more often (boosting training numbers and learning).
- 7) Make friendly bet w/ doubters: give you 6-months to try methods and then compare attendance and evals to same period from previous year.
- 8) Deduce your likely proponents and opponents (bifurcate roll-out to just the proponents); Proponents – sell them first; Opponents – don’t fight battle with them, let them get convinced with results with proponents and then try small amounts first.
- 9) “Just take a sip” – it doesn’t have to be a disco everytime, but encourage presenters to pick something from your list of fun to ‘mix-it-up.’
- 10) Let them take ownership – As above giving them the list of things they can do or that you can assist on fosters their involvement and buy-in to the project.
- 11) Highlight for speakers/leadership when evaluations come back and comment on the ‘fun factor’ as memorable and therefore important.

Extra, Extra, Read All About It! (Thoughts to keep in mind as you design putting ‘fun’ into your CLE.)

- Put the ‘dull’ stuff from a presentation into a handout or after-program electronic document. Make materials short, concise w/ summaries; skill sheets; forms; checklists (Attorney love information boiled down and this will be fun for them to learn!)
- No Joking – discourage jokes, they are hard to pull off for most folks, and always run risk of offending.
- Don’t let your speaker stray to far into ‘fun’ from their comfort zone; think about your most austere presenter showing up in a clown costume to present – it just won’t work.
 - Before you sign-off on an area of fun, think, “will the audience cringe?”
- You are the ringleader – guide the circus! (for complex multi-part programs or ‘fun’ make sure you are directing it as it occurs or some folks may get trampled by the elephant.)

- Remember effective tools teachers have used with you over the years. (elementary, HS, College)
- Keep a journal of 'fun' ideas ACLEA presentations utilize to liven up the audience (remember the building blocks exercise at ACLEA-Vegas?)
- Cross-share ideas from your internal speakers.
- There are tons more ideas out there – learn from each other, books on subject, and internet research.

Thank-you for allowing me to present and prepare these materials for you.
If you ever have any questions or thoughts:

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