Getting ready for the classroom - Trainers getting schooled

By Jeanne Johnson

While classroom training for the new SAP software at Johns Hopkins doesn't officially begin until mid-October, preparations to get more than 11,000 users ready to use the new system are in full force. From crafting storyboards to computing a master training schedule, the HopkinsOne training staff is busy getting ready.

One of the most important tasks they have will be getting the classroom trainers fully prepared to take on the course load.

It begins with the simplest of things, like welcoming people to a classroom. That may sound like it would be simple or even perfunctory. But the way that professional training communicator Katherine Abbott pulled it off during a role playing exercise last week in Mount Washington was downright artful.

Monica Henry, one of those instructors getting trained, was asked to play act the role of reluctant student, a part she pulled off with compelling realism, entering the room exuding hostility and indignation.

"Did you have a tough time making it in this morning?" Abbott gently asked Henry, the tone of her voice full of genuine understanding. Though the situation was contrived, the interplay was genuine, and Abbott's demeanor was irresistibly disarming. Before long, Henry, who is usually friendly and pleasant, was answering some non-threatening questions and she couldn't help but drop the irritated facade.

"All I really need to do is question and listen," Abbott told the class of nine trainers-in-training from throughout Johns Hopkins. They're among about 50 people this month who will take Abbott's three day course, *The Tech Trainer's Advantage*, to help prepare them to teach others how to use SAP, the software being installed by the HopkinsOne project.

It covers everything from how to dissipate nervousness to using visual aids to involving participants in the learning process no matter what their learning style: visual, auditory or kinesthetic.

Content-specific, Web-based training for almost 300 courses will be available Sept. 18. Starting Oct. 23, these trainers will be among those who will lead classroom instruction. But for now, they're learning skills and techniques that benefit all classroom teaching and help them to overcome common problems no matter what the content.

Once classroom training starts, most of these trainers will train others one day a week and work at their regular jobs the remainder of the week.

Participants also presented videotaped demonstrations — both work and non-work related — that the other participants critiqued.

"I love this class because people can get so creative," said HopkinsOne Instructor Coordinator Patricia Olson. "It helps people to understand what gets learners to learn and make the material their own.

"Adults learn by doing," Olson said, so the course focuses on how to engage participants instead of lecturing them. For example, she said, "By asking the right questions, you might change someone with a resistant mindset into someone with a problem-solving mindset. Ask them, 'Is your system good now?' 'What would you like to do better?' You might be able to turn someone around and show them that the new system presents an opportunity to streamline routine functions, use good data, and do more interesting work. The important thing is to engage them in the process."

For example, in one of the exercises, a group of three trainers clustered around a flip board, discussing how to deal with user resistance. In addition to coming up with some solutions — such as emphasizing benefits — they were also practicing how to facilitate and manage a classroom.

A major point of Abbott's course is that a good trainer fills four roles: facilitator, manager, presenter, and director.

Before the day was over, the participants skillfully recounted the day's lessons and anticipated solutions to problems.

"You're all demonstrating so much of what we've been talking about," Abbott said, as the training wrapped up on the third day. "When you started this course, I sensed your nervousness, but you've got this inside of you. You won't get all of these problems, but now you'll be more prepared."

Jeanne Johnson was in charge of internal communications during the HopkinsOne implementation of SAP. This article was the result of her attending *The Tech Trainer's Advantage* workshop. She can be reached at: **jjohns84@jhuadig.admin.jhu.edu**