

Running courses to grow our people

This document has been prepared as an aid to assist churches in how to best organise and maximise the impact of training courses offered to their congregants. It has been prepared comprehensively but by no means does this mean that each and every aspect has to be carried out as detailed and discussed. Congregations need to assess what works for them within the space and ambit of their level of expertise and budgetary means. This is a framework and can be used as a checklist to help achieve best results.

Determining the need for a course or training intervention

- One should start by carefully considering what the need in the congregation is. The purpose of a training intervention should address a specific need or push towards a required/ desired outcome. Ideally it should tie into and add to the achievement of the congregations: vision, mission and strategy.
- A training course and the need thereof must be intentional, i.e. not just for the sake of doing it or because we have done it before lets show the congregation we are busy working.
- Consideration should be given to whether the need is best addressed by a training course or should/ could it rather be better handled by preaching a sermon series, teaching on the topic in small groups, or infiltrating bible studies, small groups with applicable materials and resources.
- If it is decided that a training course is best suited, it should be considered as to whether the course should take the form of a workshop, whether it should be lecture based, discussion based, experiential, theoretical, practical etc.

Deciding on the material

- Now that it has been established that a training course is the required intervention, it is key to determine what material will/ should be used. Consideration needs to be given to the source of this material and the implications of the selection. Questions to consider about the material are:
 - Should the course be developed in-house,
 - Is a tailor-made solution available,
 - Should an existing course be modified and tweaked to suit the demographic, needs and situation of the congregation,
 - What experience do other churches have in terms of doing similar courses,
 - Applicability to the context,
 - Adaptability of material,
 - Copyright restrictions, and
 - Can I get help from the MAD committee or website.
- Logistical considerations about the material needs to be made, these include but are not limited to:
 - Cost
 - Timing
 - Duration
 - Resources in manpower to deliver the outcome required
 - Venue suitability

The above are considered at a very high level, almost intuitively. The thoughts and ideas generated around the choice of material and logistical constraints will form part of the process of developing the course and workable solutions to eliminate hindrances. At this stage any impediments or restrictions are not in any way show stoppers. This is just a method and manner to begin ranking and rating potential course material.

Ultimately you will need to make a decision about which material seems to be the best fit for achieving your desired results.

Developing the course and course planning

This stage of a course lifecycle ultimately determines what the final finished product will look and feel like. It involves planning and development and the bulk of the work happens now. This stage is comprised of multiple facets that seem largely independent but ultimately the overall success of the course is dependent on them functioning as a cohesive unit. Some facets to consider are:

- Marketing and Advertising
- Budget
- Course material Development
- Planning resources (trainers)
- Presentation Aids
- Memory hooks
- Logistics
- Removing obstacles
- Evaluation and feedback

Marketing and Advertising

- Give yourself sufficient time to advertise to your congregations. Give them potential save the dates well in advance.
- Use your announcements to generate interest and excitement.
- Sell the benefits of the course and how it will benefit the individual, the church and the Kingdom of God.
- Use members of your team to do the promotion work. If the material selected has marketing and advertising clips, posters etc. included, use them too. If this is the second time you are doing the course, use people to advertise it who attended it before and found it meaningful.
- Create hype around the course....it is something not to be missed!
- Let other congregations around you know about it and encourage them to participate as well.

Budget

- It is important to set a budget for the course. Determine what is available and then do your best with that.
- Consider charging a nominal fee for the course to cover printing costs. In this way people are more likely to keep attending as they have already made a financial investment and commitment.
- Sometimes recognise that this training course may be very important in the life of the congregation and spiritual formation of individuals. Do the material and the course justice, don't just under resource it and loose its impact. Apply your mind and determine the impact of under resourcing and or over resourcing - look for a healthy balance based on ones needs and constraints.

- Be creative in your ideas, people can also be asked to purchase the course work book or you can try bulk purchasing for additional discount. People can also share books and resources.
- Monitor and track budgets to determine the outcome to better improve budgeting for future courses.

Material Development

- Whether you are developing from scratch, tweaking or using a straight out the box course, keep your overall objective and need in mind.
- You know your audience and you should be mindful of their context.
- If you are modifying existing material or tweaking an existing course, make sure you have reviewed the entire course, its outcomes and structure. You may have modified the course by skipping over an earlier section just to realize later it becomes a major theme. It would then be difficult to play catch up.

Resource planning (trainers)

- Select your trainers and presenters carefully. Give them sufficient time to properly prepare. Encourage them to present a dry run of the presentation to a focus group or course team. This helps to settle nerves and allows creative input for improvement and development.
- Consider running a train-the-trainer for a course that has been run before if new presenters are being used.
- Having varying voices during a course helps to keep people's attention.
- Presenters should know what the other presenters will be sharing to ensure there is no overlap or contradictions of material.
- Presenters must stick to their timing allocations for their particular sections. Overruns can put other presenters to follow under pressure.
- Sometimes delays or extended sessions cannot be avoided; presentation teams need to be flexible and responsible in how they deal with such situations.

Presentation Aids

- Consider which presentation aids are available to you. It is important to realise that not all people learn in the same way. Some learn better from visual presentations, others prefer audio or group discussions etc. Consider trying to bring in a mix to appeal to everyone. Relying on one medium can create a dependency and ultimately also alienate people who do not share that learning style. (VAK – Visual, Audio and Kinesthetic [interactive learning/ tactile])
- Keep people's attention by keeping them guessing what is next, but balance it out otherwise they are just waiting to be entertained and wanting a show.
- Beware death by Powerpoint and never underestimate the power of a good story.

Memory hook items/ gifts

- Using memory hooks or gifts is a wonderful way to reinforce the message and to allow people to easily remember the event and therefore the material. It provides a natural means of referral and depending on the nature of the item, an opportunity for the person to advertise the event and potentially share their faith.
- Using memory hook items or gifts also creates an awareness and excitement and can often be the reason a person will return the following week. It is a draw or an attraction.

- Memory hook items and gifts need not be expensive and are an excellent way to involve members of the congregation with active participation. Examples of memory hook items can be crosses fashioned out of twigs, book marks, scripture verses printed on sticker paper, mugs, stones, beans in bottles, boxes of soya mince, stress balls, blessing cards, match boxes, poems. Creativity is the order of the day. It is not about the cost or the item, but what the item reminds the person of.

Logistics

- Reproduction of materials – Whichever manner of material reproduction has been selected, ensure they are reproduced timely and sufficient are available for when they are needed. Try to include colour where possible to differentiate the weeks/ sections.
- Make sure provision is available for note taking, pens paper, clipboard etc.
- Time of course – consider optimum time and overall timing. Avoid courses running late at night when people are tired. Carefully plan in respect of school holidays, sporting events and church calendars. Avoid crazy season. Make a contract with people that the course will start on time and end on time. Consider opening with a brief praise and worship session as a buffer to allow any late comers to make it. Don't advertise this will happen.
- Table arrangements, seating, venue layout must be considered and be ready when the people arrive.
- Have people available to assist with questions and requests. A big welcome with a smile goes a long way to making an environment conducive to learning. Have signs clearly directing people to toilets etc., especially if there are visitors or people have brought friends.

Removing Obstacles

- It is crucial to determine what events, situations or obstacles exist that will prevent people from coming to the course. It is obviously not possible to address all obstacles or personal obstacles that are related only to certain individuals. Where possible plans should be made to remove the obstacles to take away peoples excuses from coming. In many contexts the following could be examples:
 - The children need to go to bed – Solution to offer kids sitting and mattresses to sleep on
 - It is too cold – Get sufficient heaters
 - The church lights are too dull – bring in sufficient lighting etc.
 - I cannot attend on weekends – Offer during the week and *vice versa* etc.
 - It is not safe to park outside the church at night – hire a security guard for the evening.
 - There is no transport available at night – consider forming lift clubs or hiring taxi's by special arrangement for the evening.
 - We have insufficient resources – fundraise to turn it into a project and an event.

Evaluation and feedback

- Evaluation is never easy and asking people for their comments can be hurtful. It is however important that some form of evaluation be considered. Feedback must always be geared so that the course can be made better and improve effectiveness.
- Using your focus group/ course team at the end of the session as a sounding board can provide tremendous creativity and be a form of good solid evaluation. It allows then for an opportunity to feedback into the next sessions. Questions to ask and consider include: "What went well and what will make this and us even better?"

- The need exists for the course to remain fairly flexible and fluid until one is satisfied the sweet spot is achieved in terms of format, content and overall logistics.
- Giving participants course evaluation forms at the end of the course is useful for overall feedback, however they limit the way in which you can react and change the existing course. They are often valuable, if properly designed, as an input for the next course.
- Make sure you share the course you have developed with others; you can have it placed on the MAD website.

Delivering the course

- Know your audience, what works for them and what demographic they are. Also don't be scared to push them out of their comfort zones. Use an effective ice-breaker to relax and set a good tone. Ice-breakers should be short and powerful not longwinded and complicated.
- Make sure all material is well prepared, complete and accurate before the course starts. This saves time, limits frustration and improves professionalism. People are far more likely to listen and pay attention if the material is orderly, complete and organised.
- Use humour, it relaxes people and provides an environment where openness and participation is encouraged.
- Discuss how you will deal with questions, i.e. at the end of the session, during etc.
- Provide sufficient time for breaks, leg stretches etc.
- If you are using audio visual equipment, test all aspects thereof before the course starts so as to not cause a break or loose the flow of the presentation.
- Always move people to action. Give them challenges to immediately go and attempt to reinforce the learning. Make all material practical and give them clear ways of applying their learning's into everyday life.

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- Source and implication of material selected
- Logistical considerations

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