



STORIES TRAINERS TELL

Right Under Your Nose

Contributor

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Sharon has been an author, teacher, trainer, and consultant for thirty years. She works with people and companies who want to fine tune their information-delivery skills. She is a trainer for corporate human resource programs, national workforce development organizations, and educational institutions across the United States. A member of the National Speakers Association and director of The Lake Tahoe Trainers Group, Sharon is also the author of five popular teaching and training books, including her newest, *Preventing Death by Lecture!* (2001).

Type and Purpose(s)

Vignette; entertain and engage

Background

The story describes what happens on Sharon's first cross-country flight as a student pilot with Gary, her instructor, when she goes to land the plane.

Presentation Tips

Sharon begins to panic when she cannot find the landing strip. Your voice needs to reflect this change in emotion. Gary's vocal response to her should be quiet, yet matter-of-fact.

Set-up

Option 1—Ever find yourself at a loss for what to do in a situation where you need to take action?

Option 2—Where's the best place to look for something that you can't find?

Option 3—When we are training others, we need to assess when's the best time to jump in and help them when they're practicing a skill.

Right Under Your Nose

A Cessna 172. Red and white. Four-seater. My first dual cross-country flight as a student pilot. All checked out to fly from the South Lake Tahoe Airport, high in the California Sierras, to Fallon, Nevada, a tiny airstrip in the middle of the Nevada desert.

My flight plan in my lap, the little plane droning loudly in the still morning air, I turned in the direction of Fallon and set the navigation instruments to guide me there. My instructor Gary sat in the right seat, quietly offering suggestions to polish my level flight skills.






An hour later, checking and rechecking my location, I proudly announced, “Here we are!” Then I looked around for the airstrip. To my consternation, I couldn’t see it anywhere. I rechecked the instruments, looked over to the left and the right of the little plane, then said with panic in my voice, “But it should be here! The airstrip should be right here. But I don’t see it and can’t find it. What am I doing wrong?”

Gary sat in silence for about thirty seconds, until it became obvious that I didn’t have a clue as to what to do next. Then he smiled, leaned forward, and whispered, “Look under your nose!”




I looked straight under the nose of the plane and sure enough, I was directly over the tiny airstrip. I had missed seeing it because it was under me and not in my line of vision.

Gary and I had a good laugh about it and I’ve remembered the lesson to this day: When you’re looking for what you need most and can’t seem to find it anywhere, ...[look] under your nose!

Debrief Questions

-  What do you think was going through Sharon's mind when she could not immediately find the airstrip?
-  What might have caused the problem for Sharon?
-  When have you experienced a similar situation in life—either from Sharon's perspective or from the perspective of her instructor?
-  What lessons does this story hold for you?
-  What types of “look under your nose” situations occur across organizations? How can organizations successfully address them?

Key: Three Levels of Debrief Questions

-  **The Story:** What the story means—its moral or main lesson. What the story characters have experienced.
-  **The Learner:** How the participant feels about the story and how it personally applies to the individual.
-  **The Organization or World:** How the story applies to the participant's work group, department, business unit, division, organization, industry, or to society-at-large.

Key Point Options

1. Often when we cannot locate what we are looking for, our first reaction is to panic. However, this reaction can be counterproductive. It is not particularly conducive to getting our mind and our body to act in concert in a thoughtful manner to help us locate what we are looking for.
2. Sometimes the most obvious response in a situation where we need to take action is the one that is overlooked because it is right in front of us. This can be the case in problem solving, strategic planning, crisis management, and organizational change. Additionally, when a solution becomes complex and is no longer simplistically elegant, it may not be the appropriate response to take.
3. One of the challenges of teaching others new skills in a training, mentoring, or coaching environment is that we, as the teacher or facilitator in the situation, sometimes jump in too quickly to rescue the person who is learning. If there is time for the learner to reflect in the moment (there is no immediate risk to anyone or anything), it is best to have the person think through the situation on his or her own until it becomes plainly evident the person does not know what to do.

Follow-up Activity

Step 1—Small-Group Discussion: Brainstorm what a person can do in the moment to alleviate anxiety and panic when the correct response is not apparent so an appropriate response/reaction can enter one's stream of consciousness. Record these items on easel paper.

Step 2—Large-Group Discussion: Have the small groups compare their lists. Have people determine which methods would work best for them personally.

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