



review

Real dialogue (and we mean real!) by Bill Ellet

➤ *Dialogue: Now You're Talking!*, video/DVD, 2004, 94 mins. (4 programs), Quality Media Resources (800-800-5129, www.qmr.com), \$525 per program, \$1,575 for full program. Facilitation guide, PowerPoint slides.

Robert Rosell and his collaborators have accomplished something unusual in *Dialogue: Now You're Talking!* They have managed to combine compelling content with a level of dramatic realism that I have never seen in a training program.

The content is the dialogue process described in *The Magic of Dialogue*, a book I reviewed and highly recommended in 2000. It is a process of talking that seeks to discover how the parties to a conflict perceive it and seeks a resolution that respects these differing perspectives. It has much in common with talking therapy and the principles of *Getting to Yes* and other conflict resolution approaches.

The magic of this VHS-DVD program is not in the content, however. You can understand the approach by reading the book. What the video does is show you how the process works—with emphasis on *show*. In the interests of time, most training programs take a reductive approach: They show the process achieving an impossibly ideal victory—the training equivalent of the Hollywood happy ending.

This one is different

This program is different. It has the courage to demonstrate the process more honestly. It is taut with feeling and detours into dead ends. It does achieve some understanding and forward progress, but in the end, everyone understands there is more work to do—a lot more.

Here is an example from Program 2, *Dialogue for Cultural Understanding*. Cleo is a Latina supervisor who has been passed over for the big job in the department. When the facilitator from HR asks her at one point to comment, she refuses, and in that moment of refusal, we sense all of her frustration and anger. At this point, we

think that she is angry about ethnic bias that she thinks has allowed an outsider to be brought in over her.

In time, as the dialogue slowly and painfully peels away the layers of defensiveness and emotion, we find that the CEO has promised to promote Cleo and encouraged her pursuit of an education to prepare her for that. When the moment of truth arrived, though, she feels she has been betrayed, and all of her wrath is focused on the person who got the job instead of her. In the end, she is relieved to have been heard, but her hurt and frustration are not going to be washed away quickly.

Training videos have long been known for their tendency to ape television and the movie industry. There is no problem for which a training video could not fabricate a happy ending in which everyone has learned the skills being taught, and those skills magically remove whatever problem is creating an obstacle to better performance.

The extended vignettes in *Dialogue* show progress being made, but it is made honestly, with ups and downs and tangents. The dialogue is edgy and unpredictable. It demonstrates unproductive behavior. In the end, success is by no means assured, but all of the participants have gotten past their initial positions and revealed something of the truth as they see it.

Another Training Media Review writer, Lynn Monaco, has a different take on this program, and I respect her views. One of her criticisms of the program is that it does not stop during the vignettes to show how a mistake by a participant can be corrected. I think the intention is to show a holistic process, to show how it unfolds and why it requires patience and a tolerance of “mistakes.” Eventually, if the process is followed, participants will come to a vastly better understanding of the underlying issues and obstacles. Even then, there is no guarantee that all the problems will be solved. But if significant process is made on the critical issues, in the real world, that is a great accomplishment.

Pieces of the program

This four-part program consists of an introduction to the dialogue process and three applications (cross cultural, gender, and age), but



the general application topics include a multitude of issues encountered at work: nepotism (real or perceived), position power, and so on. I think the first module is a prerequisite for the other three. The process is reviewed in brief in each program, and the facilitation guide provides additional support, but I think that if you are going to invest training time in this program, you will get the best value by making sure everyone is well grounded in dialogue. With the total running time of better than 90 minutes for the four parts, you may want to focus just on those that have the highest immediate value in your organization.

Dialogue differs from other forms of oral communication. Given the lousy models of public discourse on display in the media (shock jocks, politicians, sports stars, self-appointed cultural critics), people need to understand the need for a different approach to talking in organizations that are actually trying to get something done. Some percentage of employees and managers will reflexively pooh-poo a program like this as touchy-feely training. But more broad-minded individuals in organizations that are more realistic about what actually goes in the workplace will rush to embrace *Dialogue: Now You're Talking!*

The support materials have a difficult challenge. They have to support a process that is not a lockstep one-two-three affair, as is the case with many training programs. Real dialogue is characterized by twists and turns, and learning it is not well served by pat linear versions. So the producer has done a reasonably good job of trying to capture on paper what is happening in the video. The support materials also have to make the assumption that some buyers will not be using the first program or that the training on the application videos will occur well



after training on the first module. Thus, the facilitator's guide has a series of appendices that provide training on the basic dialogue process.

The entire support package, including video transcripts and PowerPoint slides, is available on CD, which makes reproduction and editing a snap.

Recommendation

Would you like the people in your organization to handle conflict more productively? Of course you would. But are you willing to try to do something about it? That's the more important question. If you are willing (and we don't underestimate the commitment required to take on the task), you will find no better video-based program to help you than *Dialogue: Now You're Talking!* It is extraordinary.

Bill Ellet is editor of Training Media Review.

Dialogue product rating

Holds viewer interest	★★★★
Acting/Presenting	★★★★
Diversity	★★★★1/2
Production quality	★★★★
Value of content	★★★★
Instructional value	★★★★
Value for the money	★★★★
Overall rating	★★★★

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Outstanding ★★★★★

Above average ★★★1/2

Poor ★

Very good ★★★★1/2

Average ★★

NA Not applicable

Good ★★★

Below Average ★1/2

NR Not rated (usually not enough information)