



Workshops, seminars and classes are incredible learning tools for congregations. They can provide inspiration, refreshed views and new concepts and ideas. Often putting into action the innovative ideas and plans presented, however, can get lost, forgotten or met with lukewarm reception once the event is over.

Following are some ideas on how to get the best results from an educational event.

- **Picking a winner:**

Read the brochure, check out the website and browse through the facilitator's biography to be sure you know exactly what you are getting into. It is important to be sure the topic of the event is in line with your expectations before plunging in. You should also be very clear of your motivation for attending the event – to study the topic, to become energized by others also pursuing a certain project, or just to enjoy the free lunch.

- **Make it a group project:**

There is strength in numbers. Attending the educational event with a team of folks from your congregation increases the volume of information that gets absorbed and taken back for use. Several sets of ears can also hear different ideas – one person may pick up on something that another might miss. This team can also help you positively communicate the information to your ministry staff, lay leaders and committees. Find out what others in your congregation hope to glean from the workshop – this may give you new perspectives on the topic and help you listen for concepts and ideas you may not have recognized before. Tell others you are attending the event. The more people who know, the more likely it is they will be interested in what you have learned.

- **Every learner is unique:**

Each person absorbs and retains information in his or her own way. Some take copious notes, while others merely listen without jotting down a single word. Whatever your style, be aware of it and ready to accommodate. If you are a note-taker, bring a pad of paper. If you like to listen intently, be sure you are comfortable and ready to focus. Capture ideas that spark an interest – stop, take note and think about who in the congregation would want to know this.

- **Keep your mind and heart open:**

Approach the event from a spiritual discipline perspective. Pray about the event and quiet your mind so that new information can take hold and you can be open to fresh ideas.

- **Wow! This is so much information:**

Remember that not all information presented at an educational event will be relevant to your congregation. You don't have to memorize or write down every idea because they won't all necessarily fit your purpose. Glean from the event what you need, what your congregation can use, and what is best for your congregation's specific project or spiritual direction. Remember that ideas can be adapted to fit your congregation's needs.

- **Build in time to reflect:**

If you attend the event with others from your congregation, find a time soon after to meet and reflect upon what was learned. If you attended alone, report immediately to your committee, board or task force.

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- **Selling the ideas:**

Finding the right folks to help you spread the word about what was learned is imperative in keeping issues alive. Those with a passion for the project and those who are influential in your congregation provide a good starting point. Know what committees would be involved in the particular issue you have studied and get them on board. The congregation must take ownership in an idea -- this is a vital part of any project's success.

- **On your marks, get set, go:**

Find a good starting point. Your congregation cannot implement everything at once, so decide on one key element and begin there. It's always best to find something that really gets folks excited. Excitement builds upon excitement, and this is just what is needed to get the ball rolling.

- **Accounting isn't just about money:**

Find a variety of ways to be accountable to the issues. Be accountable to those who are depending on information about the event. Once a specific part of the project or key issue is decided upon, be accountable to plans, timelines, reports and activities. These benchmarks will keep the momentum going and keep things from falling through the cracks. Without a plan, the idea will most likely get moved to the side to make room for other everyday priorities.

- **Keep in touch:**

Maintain contact with those you met at the educational event. They can be good resources for getting advice or second opinions or even comparing notes on the projects at hand.

- **Celebrate your success:**

Any purposeful activity should be celebrated. This is great motivation to continue forward movement.

- **It takes time:**

Be patient. It often takes a while for new ideas and changes to get off the ground. Congregational learning rhythms and timing should be respected. An idea can sometimes sit for a lengthy period of time before the congregation is ready to embrace it. There may be some failures and false starts before the success unfolds.

- **Keeping the faith:**

If you are passionate about the issues, continue to work toward implementation. Don't allow the information to be ignored. Shepherd the ideas through the congregation and be faithful to your portion.

## Sources

Sources for this piece include Tim Beuthin, Education Director at Indianapolis Center for Congregations; Fred Oaks, consultant with Indianapolis Center for Congregations and minister at Southport Baptist Church; Alan Archibald, North United Methodist Church; Arnold Bienstock, Congregation Shaarey Tefilla; Kara Brinkerhoff, First Friends Meeting; Karen Brown, Unitarian Universalist Church of Indianapolis; Bill and Judy Casteel, First Christian Church of Beech Grove; Judith Fackenthal, Garfield Park Baptist Church; Jan Goodyear, Cumberland First Baptist; Dan Riley, Lockerbie Square United Methodist Church; Deno Rousopoulos, Church at the Crossing; Don Treadwell, The Church Within; and the June/July 2004 issue of NACBAGram.

*The Indianapolis Center for Congregations is happy to suggest some excellent educational events for your congregation or converse with you about your educational needs.*

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