

- Now compare their ratings with yours. What’s working? What’s not? What are the differences between your impressions and theirs? And why do you think that is? Take the evaluations to heart, and think about what you might be able to do to improve the situation.
- Then, sometime in the following weeks—and after you’ve read this booklet—try out some of our suggestions. Afterward, give everyone a new copy of the “Participant’s Rating Card,” and ask them to rate the statements again. Repeat the process of averaging their comments; then record the averages in the third column of your rating card. Do you see the difference the R.E.A.L. approach makes? We’re willing to bet that you’ll see immediate, positive changes.

Perhaps you’re thinking the R.E.A.L. philosophy sounds great but implementing it would be a stretch for you and your group or class. No worries. We’re here to help you with the stretching, too. Read on.



Create an Environment That Invites Learning

If your meeting place *weren't* your meeting place, would you want to hang out there?

If the answer is no, then here are some more questions to ask yourself and members of your group. In what kind of environment would *they* like to learn? To what kind of environment would *they* want to bring their friends? How can your environment help people feel welcome from the moment they walk in?

YOUR MEETING AREA

Stop and take an objective look at your surroundings. Evaluate what your space communicates to others. Ask these questions:

- **Is everybody comfortable?** Is the temperature at a setting that's not a distraction? Are there enough chairs? Can people sit in them for the duration of your time together without fidgeting?
- **Is your room the right size?** Is it cramped and a bit stifling? On the other hand, are people way too spread out to connect with one another? Are you in a giant room where it always feels like someone's missing?
- **Does your meeting area have any character?** Is it jazzy and bright? warm and inviting? Or does it feel more like a minimum-security prison? Is there *anything* on the walls? Does your meeting area convey the character and personality of your group, or at least a sense of what they're about to learn and why it's important?
- **Is the seating arrangement conducive to good discussion?** If everyone's facing forward, change the arrangement. Also change an arrangement that has chairs placed around a long table, which tends to exclude rather than include. Putting people where they can see each other's faces makes for better discussion. Circling your chairs is ideal; you'll get everyone looking at, and relating to, one another instead of only you.
- **Does your meeting area appeal to all the senses (or at least avoid offending them)?** What would you rather smell: candles, cookies, coffee, or mold? OK, we're pretty sure that last option doesn't appeal to anyone—but you've probably been there, haven't you? And do you *really* want to go back? Again, make your meeting area as inviting as it can be for your particular group.

LIGHTING

Lighting has a direct effect on learning. One study showed that students in classrooms with more natural daylight learn more than 20 percent faster than students with less light.¹ Also, because fluorescent lighting pulses, it creates additional stress and fatigue, especially if there's no source of natural light to help out.

Use natural light if you can, but if you're stuck with fluorescent lighting, use full-spectrum tubes. Your local lighting or hardware dealer will be able to help you find them.

While you're evaluating the lighting in the room you'll use, also consider how bright it is. Think about your favorite restaurant or coffee shop; now compare it with a fast-food restaurant, where the lighting is bright and harsh. Subdued lighting is more conducive to deep conversation than bright light.

SOUND

Music has repeatedly been proven to enhance learning. Music and long-term memory are both tied to the part of the brain that's responsible for many of our emotions—so take advantage of that. The specific style of the music isn't critical, as long it's background music rather than foreground music. Soft jazz, classical, or other instrumental music will work. Music not only enhances your learning environment but can be a powerful mood setter. Use music to open your group's minds *and* hearts to what the Spirit wants to communicate.

So your meeting area is ready. Are *you*? Read on.

1. Study conducted by California Board for Energy Efficiency and Pacific Gas and Electric, cited in *The Accelerated Learning Handbook* by Dave Meier (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000) 170.