

MAKING YOUR TRAVEL TRAINING PROGRAMS ENTERTAINING

**Peggy Schmidt, Executive Director
The Partnership TMA of Montgomery County
134 N. Main St.
North Wales, PA 19454
215.699.2733
execdir@ptma-mc.org**

A very dear friend of mine who owns a mystery shopping company gave me some very good advice – She said, “Life is about making memories.” How many times do you not remember what you got for Christmas or a birthday, unless it is attached to a very special memory? Well teaching is a lot like that – you remember something that you did in class or a specific teacher that spent extra time with you. It helps you to hold onto what you have learned. My program today is going to be a little different. I am going to show you several ways that my organization, the Partnership TMA, has tried to associate a memory – a fun and positive one - with learning how to ride transit. I will warn you right now – this is a very interactive class – you going to be silly, hopefully you are going to laugh, but most important it is going to create a memory for you. Even if its “I took a class with a crazy woman today.”

I am also going to give you techniques I have used for different markets. These markets include children, seniors, bus drivers and senior management of transit operations.

We are going to start off with kids. I am going to need five volunteers. These brave individuals are going to perform for you our puppet show entitled, “Get On the Bus Gus”.

This show was designed to introduce transit to young children and those individuals young at heart. Throughout my years of teaching, I have found that children, especially shy ones, relate better to puppets. They can get the message across easily and more effectively than adults. So let's give our actors our attention.

Our next little dramatization was used to instruct bus drivers and more importantly their bosses – transit operators on service animals. We developed this after taking a workshop with Project Action Easter Seals. First, we go over information such as what is a service animal – making them understand that it is not just a dog. Then we teach them the two basic questions – Is that a service animal and what type of service does it perform. We then do this story – now it is a dramatization, but it gets the point across and creates – a memory. It also opens up a dialogue. It gives us an opportunity to discuss and recommend to all transit operators to have a service animal policy.

Now I am sure that many of you are thinking – phew she hasn't called on me and I have been smart enough not to volunteer for anything – but the next several exercises involve everyone. I like to call this exercise – riding the Magic Bus. This has been used for transit operators and in leadership classes to make individuals aware of how difficult it would be to travel with a visual impairment, especially if the bus driver is not complying with federal regulations. Now I know this is O & D, not travel training, but remember we are making the memory. Normally I use a blindfold, a paper cup and a chocolate token, but since I traveled over 7 hours to get here and bringing the puppets and the snakes was

weird enough, we are going to have to do make some adjustments. First I am going to trust you to close your eyes. Second your token will be that piece of hard candy. Third you will have to make your own fare box by making a cup with your hand.

You are going to experience this trip on the Magic Bus as if you were visually impaired. Individuals that have a successful trip - which means board successfully and arrive at the right location will win a prize. Please close your eyes. When you are given instructions to board the bus, you will take your token and put it in the coin slot (which is your paper cup). The bus will be making three stops. You are going to Main Street. The Magic Bus has arrived, please board now.

The bus is departing. The bus has pulled over – if you are departing here –open your eyes and say nothing. Do this two more times. Congratulations to the winners – pick from prize box. How did that feel? How could the trip been made better? Simple, but very effective. I also give out earplugs, if I want to use a scenario about the hearing impaired.

I spend a lot of time instructing the heads of transit operations – because oftentimes their most important criteria is – does the bus arrive and depart on time. Dramatic exercises like these, even though we think they are self explanatory and easy, seem to hammer the point home.

Now there may be times when you are travel training when you a long layover or you miss the bus. What do you do to kill the time? People will talk for a while, but they can also get restless, loose interest and

possibly wander off and get into trouble. When I knew I was going to have a long layover with a group of 20 seniors, I spoke with my senior consultant (my mother) who faithfully attended her local senior center and was always doing interesting things. She recommended a sing-a-long with a transportation theme. So when my 20 seniors got restless five minutes into a 15 minutes layover – I tried it. They loved it and you will too.

OK, now you have run out of songs and the bus is still not there. How else will you pass the time? How about musical chairs? But you are sitting down and many of your clients are 80 years old. Just like you tell your clients – be prepared. Bring a small cd player than can play your songs and when the music stops that person is out. Since I am worried about time – I am going to play the music and when it stops – the person holding the walrus will be the winner and you get to keep him too!

By now, everyone has heard of the Bus Bingo created by NVTC. It worked so well there, that we adapted our own. Our categories include: transit, safety tips and preparation tips, alternative forms of transportation, environmental barriers and destinations. At the end of the class, we going to play, but I just want to finish one with one other idea.

Bribery – we do it all the time. People love incentives! We always provide neck wallets and have lots of prizes for bus bingo. It adds to the excitement and when someone says – where did you get that? The memory of the event resurfaces. In fact, the seniors loved theirneck

wallets so much in Hazleton, PA , the transit operator had to order their own. So I have some lovely parting gifts for you today. Luggage grippers to thank you for participating in the class today.

But before we play bingo – I want to share with you my favorite poem by Ralph Waldo Emerson entitled True Success.

To laugh often and love much

To win the respect of intelligent persons and the affection of children

To earn the approbation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends

To appreciate beauty

To find the best in others

To give one's self

To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition

To have played and laughed with enthusiasm and sung with exultation

To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived

This is to have succeeded.

Each and every one of you that has taught one individual to move about independently and with dignity is a true success. Thank you for coming, I hope we made a memory here today, go forth and prosper.

Bingo.