

INFOCUS



Introducing

Marc Ratcliffe



Marc is the CEO and Founder of MRWED Training and Assessment, a private Australian Registered Training Organisation, specialising in trainer training. He has been involved in workplace and vocational education for 21 years and has delivered training to thousands of students in areas as diverse as business management, health and safety, marketing, team building and training and development. This experience includes conducting over 300 courses in "trainer training" in the last 15 years. In addition to this, he has presented training-related workshops internationally in North America, Africa and Asia. He is a Registered Teacher and has completed a Masters in Education specialising in Adult and Workplace Education.

His organisation MRWED is one of Australia's leading providers of trainer training and has been rated as a four time Australian Best Place to Work by the Great Places to Work Institute and BRW Magazine, named as one of Asia's best employer brands in 2011 and won Australian Business Awards for recommended employer, outstanding financial success and consistent growth. In Addition to this, the organisation was a state finalist in Training Provider of the Year in 2008, a top 10 Queensland Training Provider from 2007-2011 and named as one of the State's Top 400 privately owned businesses by Business Queensland Magazine for a fifth consecutive year in 2011. Marc won a personal accolade in 2009, by being named as one of the US Training Magazine's top 10 young trainers for the year. He was also awarded a "Strategic Leadership Award" by

the HRD World Congress in 2012. Marc is also one of only two people in Australia certified to conduct Bob Pike's Train-the-Trainer Boot Camp, the world's most well-respected train-the-trainer program.

The art of 'edu-tainment'

Marc's first educational role was as a secondary school teacher. This taught him much about patience and the need to be creative to engage the learning. *"I think you have to continue to try different things, to find what works best and to keep yourself motivated. Too much of the same thing is never good and early on I made a commitment to myself to try something new each time I am training. 20 years on, I am still trying new things every week and as such, I still love what I do. Recently I rediscovered coloured pipe cleaners and have created more than a dozen new activities using these including my new favourite; creating a learning mascot."*

From this early role Marc learned that you get out of an experience, what you put in. *"When your audience sees that you are putting in the effort they will be compelled to work hard too. It is like a pendulum and as trainers we want it to swing in our favour."*

Further to this, he learned that enthusiasm plays an integral role to your success as a trainer. If a trainer is not enthusiastic about their content, how can they expect their participants to be enthused? He feels that far too many trainers are *"just going through the motions"* and do not invest enough of themselves in their presentations. *"Enthusiasm can be infectious. Conversely, a lack of enthusiasm can be terminal."*

Marc believes that Teaching, Training and Facilitating are a confidence game. You have to be confident both in the subject matter and in your ability to deliver this. 20+ years on, Marc believes this is an area that he has developed well.

Marc has spent a considerable amount of his working years focusing on what he calls *"edu-tainment"* – creating a memorable experience for each learner through a sense of fun and elements of theatre.

"Like it or not, training is part education and part entertainment. But there are some simple things that we can all do with our performance that can assist in attracting and maintaining the attention of the audience and transform our training into edutainment. For instance, music could be used effectively in a variety of ways:

- As an introduction to signpost the beginning of the session;
- As sound effects (e.g. drum roll or cheering) used when participants share responses.

- During get-to-know-you activities to promote positive networking;

- During small group discussions to signal the duration of the activity (i.e. we come back when the music stops)

Further to this, the use of chimes or other musical instruments can be a fun way to identify the conclusion of a discussion activity."

A Trainers View on Industry Organisations

Marc is currently a member of ACPET, AITD and ASTD. He thinks they all have different benefits to offer. However, the greatest benefits Marc believes is the professional development opportunities each organisation offers. He spent a long time in the training wilderness plying his trade and trying to be the best trainer he could be. But five years after he started his training business, he needed more. *"I needed the networking and I needed to see what others were doing so I could both affirm my own practices as well as get ideas that I could adapt, adopt or apply."*

ACPET are a great voice for private providers and I love the proactive work that they are currently doing to support members and grow our industry both domestically and overseas. They continue to be great advocates and ambassadors for the VET sector.

AITD have a wonderful annual conference and regular magazine for members, which provide great tips and advice for people in the learning and development space. Again, they are doing some great work in growing the capacity of our industry.

ASTD are the American equivalent of AITD, but on a much larger scale. Their conferences are first class, their publications well written and their research is both thought-provoking and relevant. I have spoken at their International conference a few times and the scale of the event is unlike anything we have in Australia. It is well worth a visit!"

It's not rocket science!

Marc believes that being a successful RTO is not rocket science ... *"if RTOs provide a great experience for learners, develop productive partnerships with industry and are committed to on-going continuous improvement, they will be well on the way to success!"*

However Marc believes there are two key pitfalls that novice RTOs make that are:

Being under-capitalised - this is true of any beginning business – *"but I think there are a lot of*

hidden costs that new RTOs don't see when developing their initial business plans. Further to this, cash flow can be challenging if you are targeting corporate or government clients who pay on 30 or 60 day terms."

Creating Sustainable pricing

- when you are a single-person operation, it is easy to price low, as overheads are also low. "However, as the business grows (or if you ever want to take a break and have someone replace you) then sustainable long term pricing is necessary. I see a lot of new RTOs offer opening specials. However, what they forget is that this "special" is what the customer expects and will in time become the normal price."

"We are a 4 time Australian best place to work and I think the secret to success in our industry (as well as any other for that matter), is to look after yourself (health-wise and in terms of professional development), look after your people and look after their families.

We need to remember that we have living, breathing human beings driving our organisations, not just numbers. Whilst, I recognise that business is inherently a "numbers game", once we lose sight of the people factor, we also tend to forget that our customers are people too. Soon we will quite literally be "running on empty", as consumers look to businesses with heart and personnel move to employers of choice who value their input and show them a pathway where they can think and grow."

Marc believes this industry is a constantly evolving industry that is not afraid to change to meet the emerging needs of students and their employers. "At a training level, I love being able to meet new people every week and push myself to find new solutions to old problems."

The future of the industry

Marc believes that the increased commitment to quality and compliance has been a significant theme in the last few years. "There is a real cost to all this, which I think can be a barrier for new players. However, I think it is a positive thing that we hold our industry and those who work in it to a high standard. This will improve the confidence that consumers will have about our sector and this is good for all of us."

Due to the continued cost of compliance and the increased expectations from customers Marc suspects that the industry will reduce in the number of RTOs in total, but will have larger RTOs in general.

He also expects the industry to continue to be at the frontline of preparing workers for a constantly changing economy and that RTOs that are agile and prepared to move to meet changing needs will continue to prosper.

The Future for MRWED and Marc

Marc says that it is no secret that he is ramping himself up to take on the challenge of growing their international business.

"We already have mature markets in Singapore, Malaysia, India and emerging markets in Africa and North America, but we need a dedicated and consistent effort to make the most of the opportunities. I have recently appointed a new Chief Operating Officer to focus on our Domestic RTO operations and this will free me up to focus internationally.

I will also continue to write and speak at conferences, and both of these activities are natural extensions to my training career."

