Introducing an Evaluation

Sometimes I feel that the way I introduce an evaluation to program participants has a chilling effect. How can I avoid this and still conduct an evaluation?

Some suggestions to consider:

DON'T — even mention the hot words 'evaluation' or 'pretest.'

DON'T — say *you* want to find out how much participants gained from the program. State the rationale in terms of the participants' benefit.

DO — consider a self-assessment by participants in the initial segment of your program to allow them to identify what they need to learn. Make this a seminal part of your program. Why? Adult learning principles suggest that "it is typically helpful to the learning process for people to be told what they will learn so that they become prepared for the learning."

DO — introduce what you are going to do in words similar to these: "We are ready to begin the workshop. The first part involves your participating in a self-assessment of your knowledge, skills, and attitudes."

DO — add the most important part—the rationale—one that appeals to many persons: "This will help you prepare for and get into thinking about the things we will be covering today. . ."

DO — introduce post workshop measures by saying ". . the final workshop activity is for you to assess what you have learned today." Give participants the self-assessment that began the workshop saying, "This will allow you to review 'the workshop's content and allow you to identify what you have learned.'"

DON'T — squeeze the self-assessment into a few minutes at the end of your program.

DO — give participants enough time to really think about the ideas in your program. You might even include a plan of action for them to draft as part of this technique, a subtle way for you to learn their intentions for change.

Michael Patton, a practical evaluator, points out in an article in *Evaluation Utilization* (Jossey-Bass, 1988) that integrating evaluation using the above approach:

Allows pre-workshop measures to quietly:
- prepare participants for learning
- provide you with baseline data

Allows post workshop measures to:
- reinforce participants' learning
- provide you with accomplishment data

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