

## Horticultural Innovation Lab

### Experiences in Technology Dissemination

I have been asked to share some of my experiences in technology transfer, in one page. I begin by asking myself, “How can the participants relate to this technology? Can I make it relevant to their communities? Why should they even have an interest?” I have found that creating personal relationships is essential: Relationships between myself and the participants, between the participants themselves, and a personal relationship between each participant and the technology. To present the material in a way as to not be too overwhelming, I build a support group of colleagues...we build a team. As a foreigner, when I stand in front of the group, I find there are many distractions to the learning process: my speech, my mannerisms, the way I dress, to name only three things that might be more interesting than the subject at hand. The quickest way to learn a subject is to teach it, so I get people in the group begin teaching the material to their peers. They get experience in teaching, and they get to hear the information in their own language, terminology, and relevance. I present the information with spaced repetition: sometimes serious, mostly fun, sometimes theoretical, mostly hands-on. To allow participants to relax and stand up in front of a group of strangers and teach a subject that was just introduced to them can be challenging. I need to allow them to feel safe and part of a team.

The methods for team building that I have found most effective are first to begin to soften and dissolve the boundaries or barriers of the comfort zone that we all create to protect us in social interaction. I attempt to identify early on the groups that arrive together in their established social networks, and physically separate them and recombine everyone into new sub-groups. I have them perform fun tasks with people they have just met for the first time, such as color-sorting tomatoes or evaluating packaging alternatives. Each of these new groups then elects a spokesperson to describe their own group’s method of evaluation and results to the other groups. I also create silly songs and dances to get people astounded and laughing, which seems to reduce their inhibition and open up their enthusiasm to participate in creating something new. As quickly as possible, I transfer my role from leader to facilitator, allowing the participants to take ownership of the new technology and determine the best way delivery it to their own communities. They create amongst themselves a network of colleagues that they can turn to for ideas and solutions. They are enthusiastic about the technology because they helped create it...it is an answer to one of their own personal questions. My critical task may have been only to facilitate in having them ask the question in the first place. An example of this is the introduction of a cooling chamber. If they have not considered the effects of temperature on produce shelf life, and what that actually costs them, there is little interest in learning about cooling options. Once they have the realization that cooling is important, they get very excited about how to create simple cooling technologies that they can take back to their communities.

In summary, at the end of the day when the project is over, the sustainable item that we all take home is the relationship to the new technology that we have made...the network of true colleagues that we have woven, the team that we have created together. As we pause to reflect upon our new associations, we are left with an appreciation of what it has taken for all of us to arrive at this place together, whether it be a university researcher, farmer, ministry official, or market-stall vendor, we all have a unique contribution to the understanding of the whole.

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