



Getting Value from Training

All too often business and corporate training is assigned in an uncontrolled, even frivolous way. Instead of planning for success, managers assign training based on spur-of-the-moment ideas...almost a flavor-of-the-month methodology that lacks logic and focus.

The potential benefits that should be gained from training are lost because it is not focused on the value added elements of your business. Further, we find that seminar attendance fails to hit its target because the follow-on support required for successful application of the learning (facts, strategies, and techniques) is absent. And let's face it, nobody can afford to send people for training just for the fun of it, but time and again it happens.

In fact, as managers we all expect that training will somehow impact present or (and) future performance and contribute to the employing organization. But how do we "make it so"?

General Principles

Getting value from training isn't magical. Regardless of your organizational size and make up, planning and execution of training requires a dedicated effort. There are some general principles that you can adapt to ensure that training for yourself and your staff results in changes in the workplace. First, training that adds value tends to be integrated with other management systems. That is, training decisions and actions are carried out with reference to performance management systems, strategic planning processes, and career development initiatives. This means that it is essential that training supports the goals you have established for each individual and for the organization.

Training must be managed so that it is planned, and deliberately and clearly linked to workplace outcomes. What the research shows is that when training is used as a reward, or its goals aren't clear to all concerned, it rarely results in any positive impact.

Second, training that adds value actually has three components. First there is a planning component engaged in successful training. Then, training is executed in a professional and effective manner. Most important is the third component -- *follow-up*. You need to have metrics in place to evaluate pre- and post-performance (individual and team). Further, mechanisms must be in place to provide reinforcement to the learner for his or her efforts to properly implement what has been learned.

Finally, training that adds value succeeds when there is an infrastructure in place that supports the learner's application of what has been learned. For example, if people attend a workshop on the use of a computer software, training will only add value if the software and hardware is available and in place when the person returns from training.

The same thing is true for techniques and performance strategies. While we normally think of infrastructure as relating to things, it can also refer to elements like time. For example, people attending

a seminar on effective customer care will only be able to use what has been learned if the organizational infrastructure supports it, and they are allowed sufficient time to do so.

So, getting value from training requires integration, planning, follow-up and infrastructure. While getting value should be a shared responsibility on the part of attendee(s) and managers, the manager plays a critical role in helping to create the conditions under which training will add value.

Value-Added Actions

Identify Development Needs

On a regular basis, identify the developmental needs for individuals and teams in your organization. Use your performance management system and your strategic planning processes to integrate HR development with respect to the needs that you have mapped. Training will most likely add value when the needs of the individual and the organization coincide. This should be considered a key to your training process.

Contract With Attendees

One effective tool that includes your team in the realization of effective training is the use of attendee contracts. Use of an informal contracting process to define your expectations and those of training attendees successfully gains buy-in that works. The training contract may include:

- how you expect the training attendee to apply what he/she has learned.
- how the trainee is expected to share what has been learned with other members of the organization.
- what the trainee needs from you so that learning can be applied.
- when you will meet with the attendee to debrief/discuss the training and how it can be applied to your workplace.

Assess Infrastructure

Prior to training, make sure that the infrastructure is in place so that trainees will be able to apply what they have learned as soon as they return to the workplace. A good question to ask: “Is there anything that will impede the person’s ability to apply what has been learned?” After training, ask this question again, and be prepared to make necessary changes that will allow for performance improvements.

Ensure Training Is Appropriate

Training tends to add value when it is the solution to a problem. Not all problems can be solved through training, so be alert to the possibility that other solutions may be appropriate. Remember that training can help people learn skills, but is less effective at changing attitudes, and will likely have no effect if the problem is related to other factors in the workplace. Additionally, not everyone needs every training element, and the entire team may not need to be trained at the same time, especially if they are on different project tracks. Remember that training is a resource...one that does not do well when subjected to time delays and scheduling errors. Appropriate training includes training the right people...at the right time.

Conclusion

All too often, managers do not take an active role in the decision-making and follow-up necessary to ensure that training adds value to the organization. As a result, resources are often wasted, individuals and teams become frustrated, and performance is impacted. Keep in mind that managers need to work with training attendees before and after training so that the training will make a difference. To really ensure effectiveness, training must be linked to both individual and organizational needs, and barriers to application of learning must be removed.

When it comes to effective training, the manager makes the difference. Through planning and pre/post measurement we can eliminate training that is just a “vacation” and effectively implement training that yields real performance benefits for the company.

Sandy Geroux is an expert on the training process. She can effectively support your planning process through her analysis of critical performance management and strategic planning elements that are central to an effective training plan. Then she can take your training team forward with effective workshops and training implementation at all levels of your organization, from *Train-The-Trainer*, to *Team Training*, and *more*.

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