

HOW TO MAKE YOUR LEADERSHIP TRAINING STICK

by Tom Davidson, PCC, SPHR, CSP

As a manager of people, you know that training plays a central role in your job and the ultimate success of your team. Yet training often falls short of expectations.

- How many times have you sent people to training but not seen them remember or apply what they learned back on the job?
- How many three-ring binders crowd your employees' shelves that haven't been opened in months or years?
- How many dollars have you spent on training that didn't seem to make much difference in people's performance?

If your answers to these questions are alarming, you're not alone. 80 percent of employee training fails to stick, leading to one or more of the following:

- Wasted time
- Unnecessary direct costs
- High opportunity cost
- Frustrated employees
- Thin bench strength for the future

Don't blame the training, at least not right away; blame the training *support!*

BLAME THE TRAINING SUPPORT!

"Training support" is what goes on *before and after* the training. It prepares learners in advance and helps students *apply* what they have learned back on the job.

Training Coach Ron Chapman, one of the first in the nation to receive ASTD's Certified Professional for Learning and Performance (CPLP), offers two primary ways that supervisors can make training stick.

The first relates to what you can do *before* sending someone to training; the second relates to what you can do when you're providing training yourself.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU'RE SENDING PEOPLE TO TRAINING

When sending one of your employees to training, Chapman suggests the following. First, you must be clear about how the training is supposed to improve performance. Second, you need to do the following to make it stick:

- 1. Ask the trainee what he or she expects to get out of the training.** Your employees should be thinking ahead and taking ownership for the learning process before they arrive. In addition, your employees need to know how you expect them to apply the training once they get back on the job. What's important to the manager is almost always important to the learner.
- 2. Let your employees know that you will be observing them back on the job and seeing what they learned.** Look for evidence of what the learner is (or is not) using from the training back in the workplace. Just knowing that they will be observed will help maintain their interest in on-the-job application.
- 3. Provide feedback, coaching and recognition that reinforces the behaviors covered in the training.** This will help your employees continuously apply and learn from the training, ensuring a continuous learning process where it matters most, back on the job.

Noted American author, poet, and philosopher Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) put it best when he wrote:

“As a single footstep will not make a path on the earth, so a single thought will not make a pathway in the mind. To make a deep physical path, we walk again and again. To make a deep mental path, we must think over and over the kind of thoughts we wish to dominate our lives.”

It's the learner's job to apply new skills and the manager's job to be in contact with the trainee. Students should know what to focus on in the training so they can apply what has been learned back on the job.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU'RE PROVIDING THE TRAINING YOURSELF

When you're doing the training yourself (i.e., on-the-job training or conducting classroom instruction), Chapman recommends the following:

First, make sure you know what the training is supposed to accomplish and how it is intended to improve performance. The sponsoring manager and trainer must be clear about how behaviors are supposed to *change* and not settle for the simple fact that "they have to go to training."

Second, make sure that the training design and follow-up have the following features:

- **Align the training content with what the employee experiences on the job.** Use relevant stories, examples, and exercises that give employees practice and feel relevant to their workplace.
- **Reduce the lecturing and maximize involvement** of the participants. This is done with plenty of opportunity for questions and answers, group activities, peer competitions and knowledge checks.
- **Follow up with how the participants are applying the learning** on the job and have them provide feedback.

Chapman adds that in a hectic environment, the most effective thing a manager can do is set an expectation. Tell employees what one thing you expect them to be able to do differently as a result of training, then follow up to see that they are doing it. As a result, the employee will not only focus on the "one thing" but will also pick up and use many other skills from the training as well.

BEST PRACTICE TRAINING DESIGN

Despite this emphasis on training support, sometimes training is the problem, especially if it includes anything that resembles old-school spray-and-pray training methods, death by PowerPoint, or minimal interaction. Contemporary learners require a wide variety of training

modes, tools and activities, what Chapman and others call *Return on Attendance*. If your training doesn't feature most or all of the following, your training design could also be part of the problem:

- Individual assessment tools so that each learner gets customized, personal insights, even in a group-learning environment
- Interactive exercises that engage adult learners without being silly or childish like some training "games"
- Realistic role play situations that apply leadership principles to real-life, real-world, real-relevant situations from the participant's workplace
- Video clips and video-recorded exercises to bring variety and realism to the lessons learned
- Examples and analogies from the field that make key points in an appropriately entertaining and memorable way
- Electronic audience response systems for real-time knowledge checks, feedback collection and anonymous student surveys
- Comprehensive workbooks and textbooks for relevant reference material both in the class and back on the job
- Assignments, articles and personal coaching between phases
- Individual development plans that carry the learning from the classroom back to the workplace and into the future
- Accountability partners so that participants can have a private peer sounding board for their development plans.

You no longer have to spray and pray with your training dollars. You can't afford that, and you don't have to. Add training support to your high-quality training, and you will turn those training costs into investments.

To get help in making your training stick and providing the high-quality leadership training you need, contact us at Leadership Nature for an initial consultation today by calling **804-339-4653** or contacting the author directly at **Tom@LeadershipNature.com** today.