

# ENHANCE THE TRANSFER OF TRAINING

# INFO LINE

TIPS, TOOLS, AND INTELLIGENCE FOR TRAINERS

TRAINING BASICS

DENNIS E. COATES

# Enhance the Transfer of Training

## AUTHOR

### Dennis E. Coates, Ph. D.

Performance Support Systems, Inc.  
 435 Paradise Hills  
 New Braunfels, TX 78132  
 Tel: 830.907.3000  
 Email: denny@train-to-ingrain.com

Dr. Coates is CEO and co-founder of Performance Support Systems. He is the author of *20/20 Insight GOLD*, a customizable multi-source performance feedback and survey technology. He has served on the faculties of the United States Military Academy, the Armed Forces Staff College, the College of William and Mary, and Thomas Nelson Community College, and as an adjunct instructor at the Center for Creative Leadership. He is the author of numerous articles on leadership, management, and training.

### Infoline Associate Editor

Justin Brusino

### Copy Editor

Ann Bruen

### Production Design

Kathleen Schaner



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## Learning Transfer

Not long ago, I asked a branch manager of one of the largest banks in the United States about the training she had received during the past two years. In glowing terms she described a well-known effectiveness program. I asked, “Based on what you learned, how has your performance improved?” After a long pause, she replied, “It’s not that I’m doing anything differently, but I really enjoyed that course.”

No matter how excellent the instruction is, it’s rare to find people who are consistently applying what they learned in training. Organizations spend billions of dollars each year on training programs, expecting to achieve lasting, measurable improvements in performance and positive impacts on business results—a goal that is hard to achieve.

Published research confirms that only a small percentage of the participants of training programs actually change their behavior. Experts have been telling us this for decades. They estimate that most of this investment—between 70 and 90 percent—is wasted.

Cognitive neuroscience explains that changes in behavior require repetition of new behaviors to develop new connections in the brain. This process takes a lot more time than a typical training program allows. When participants first return to the workplace, their new skills feel forced and awkward, and they don’t consistently yield the desired results. Without a supportive environment, many people give in to the pressures of work and fall back on their old habits.

Recent books address what they refer to as the “transfer of training” problem. The issue, they say, is not with the trainers or their programs, but with the fact that learning is an ongoing process, not an event. A finite number of days of instruction simply can’t be expected to undo problem behavior patterns that have been ingrained for years. Experts claim that most organizations fail to follow through with enough reinforcement for individuals to ingrain the new skills they learned in the classroom.

The purpose of this *Infoline* is to help you achieve what many regard as the “holy grail of human resource development (HRD)” — permanent, measurable improvements in performance and a positive impact on business outcomes. The approach is to focus on the specific areas of training and development that most organizations fail to do well and to suggest practical strategies for achieving this highly desirable and elusive goal.

This *Infoline* builds on the work of previous *Infolines* No. 9512, “Transfer of Training,” and No. 9804, “The Transfer of Skills Training,” to provide new insights and describe specific actions you can take to improve your organization’s current system. It includes a realistic plan for getting change under way—to create a foundation of initial successes from which an organization can continue to get better results going forward.

## Enhance Training Transfer

What's needed in most organizations is not so much a revamping of the existing training and development system as optimization of current practices. Therefore, this *Infoline* will focus on eight initiatives to increase the successful transfer of training:

- Focus on shortcomings: Identify training needs that will have a positive impact on business results.
- Set up training transfer: Incorporate learning strategies that promote application and reinforcement of skills.
- Coordinate learning networks: Organize support for reinforcement.
- Prepare coaches: Get direct managers ready for their developmental role.
- Integrate follow-up: Implement reinforcement programs with assessment and training programs.
- Insist on accountability: Measure performance improvement and calculate ROI (return-on-investment).
- Align culture: Modify the organization's policies and practices to support performance improvement.
- Gain commitment: Support follow-up reinforcement.

By focusing on these eight initiatives you can drive the transfer of training in your organization.

### Focus on Shortcomings

If you want training to have a positive impact on business results, your training programs must focus on correcting performance shortfalls that negatively affect business. Take an active role in identifying these shortcomings with department managers.

Answering the following seven questions will help you establish a “direct line-of-sight” from the desired business results to the developmental program:

1. Which business results are not being met?
2. Which work units are assigned to contribute to these results?
3. Which unit performances are falling short of expectations?
4. Which areas of individual performance are contributing to this unit failure?
5. Which individual performers aren't measuring up in these areas?
6. Are the performance shortfalls due to deficiencies in knowledge or skill?
7. If so, what kind of developmental program would best correct these deficiencies?

With regard to Question 6, remember that individual performance shortfalls do not necessarily mean that employees need training. They may already know how to do what they're expected to do, but they may not have the requisite motivation or support from the organization to do their jobs.

### Set Up Training Transfer

The reinforcement of new behavior patterns has to begin in the classroom. The first step in improving performance is to introduce a model of the desired behavior. The classroom is ideally suited for this task.

Over the years, training professionals have adopted a number of adult learning methods that promote retention and learning transfer. To learn more, see the sidebar *Training Design Strategies*. The more of these elements you employ in your development programs, the better participants will be prepared for what comes afterward—the difficulties of applying, reinforcing, and ingraining new work habits. Classroom instruction can prepare learners to work through these challenges, and it can introduce them to resources and programs that support ongoing learning.

## Training Design Strategies

The following is a collection of widely used training design best practices that support follow-up reinforcement and long-term ingrainment of desired skills and work habits.

- Create or acquire courses to address performance problems that have an impact on business results.
- Create course objectives that are application oriented—what participants will need to do on the job.
- Design the course to focus on doing a few important things very well rather than covering all possible topics.
- Structure the course so that the learning is broken into short segments.
- Explain why the training is being conducted—the need for the organization to improve business results, evidence of related knowledge and skill deficiencies, or the impact of new skills on workplace performance and business results.
- Help learners understand the personal benefits of the learning—“what’s in it for them.”
- Early in the course, brainstorm with learners to focus on workplace challenges, and then refer to these scenarios during course activities.
- During instruction, relate new concepts and skills to what learners already know.
- Provide forms and build in opportunities for learners to record ideas, insights, and post-course application issues—questions, possible problems, and resources they’ll need to put skills into practice.
- Provide frequent opportunities to discuss “lessons learned.”
- Make practice exercises as realistic and work-related as possible.
- Give learners a variety of case studies and relevant articles.
- Vary the practice exercises—challenge learners with different situations and scenarios.
- Vary the membership of table groups, so learners are exposed to different perspectives.
- Give immediate individual behavioral feedback during practice exercises.
- Structure practice so that learners can give one another feedback.
- Give learners structured time to visualize correct performance on the job.
- Give learners job aids related to major skill areas—summary references that describe how-to steps.
- Preview support for post-course follow-up reinforcement: reinforcement planning, online resources, workbooks, job aids, feedback assessments, learning support groups, and direct manager coaching.
- Help learners identify individuals for a learning support group—people who can give feedback, encouragement, and advice or coaching after the course.
- Make time for learners to discuss their concerns and plans for using their new skills.
- Have learners draft a realistic plan or contract for using their new skills on the job; make copies—send to direct managers, and several weeks after the course, send to participants as a reminder.

Also, the trainer's influence isn't confined to the classroom. The next critical area describes how trainers can support learners and their direct managers after formal instruction is over.

## Coordinate Learning Networks

While only the direct manager can provide effective performance coaching in the workplace, he or she can be supported in this role. For one thing, trainers are uniquely qualified to get involved in follow-up reinforcement. Also, other interested individuals within an organization can give a developing employee advice, feedback, encouragement, and coaching during the extended period of reinforcement. Your learning network should include

- program co-participants
- peers
- co-workers
- subordinate team members
- mentors.

These adjunct coaches represent a network of support for the learner. If trainers simply encourage participants to create their own networks, results will vary widely. A more effective course is to plan and set up a system to support learning networks, tell participants and their bosses how to use it, and supervise its use. Here are some of the approaches used by successful organizations:

- “brown bag” or informal roundtable lunch meetings, during which participants review learning media, discuss on-the-job challenges, and share experiences
- webinars or teleconferences, in which trainers or guest speakers discuss performance topics with participants
- online forums, in which participants interact with supportive individuals to ask questions, discuss issues, get feedback, or share encouragement
- action plan monitoring systems, whether an online service or a manual tickler system managed by trainers.

The stakes are too high to simply hope that participants will follow through on their own. There are many ways to structure learning support using a variety of media, formats, frequency, and participants. The smart money is to find out from learners and their direct managers what they need, offer suggestions, and create a plan to make it happen.

## Prepare Coaches

Management may be willing to invest in professional coaches for executives, but coaching for the majority of employees must come from within the organization. Trainers often have good coaching skills, but they're usually busy preparing and delivering programs. In addition, there aren't enough trainers to go around. Mentors are a possible coaching resource, but most employees don't have a mentor, and mentors lack oversight and authority.

### ■ *Understanding Management's Role*

Although trainers provide learning opportunities and support, what managers do after training influences behavior far more than what trainers do in the classroom. The manager is responsible for directing, motivating, observing, evaluating, and improving the employee's performance and has the authority to tell employees what to do. The manager decides whether an employee will even have the opportunity to use newly learned skills. How well a manager carries out this role can make or break the transfer of new knowledge into permanent improvements in workplace performance.

This fact is not intended to devalue the vital role of trainers. However, trainers don't own the system, and they don't run the organization. Once program participants leave the classroom, trainers can no longer significantly influence their development. Trainers have some influence, but have practically no control over what happens in the workplace, where new skills must be diligently applied in order to be ingrained. To learn more about the role of managers in training reinforcement, see the sidebar *Learning Triangle*.

### ■ *Changing Mindsets*

For many organizations, the biggest hurdle is to change the mindsets of managers. Managers who already have more to do than they can accomplish will probably resist the idea of assuming what they perceive as “new responsibilities.” The notion that the most crucial phase of learning begins after classroom instruction is over is alien to many workplaces. Many managers exhibit these negative behaviors:

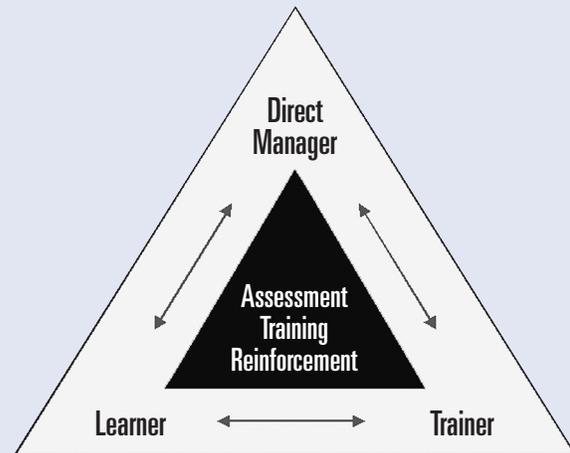
- showing reluctance to release employees for training
- contacting participants during the course—or even worse, calling them away from classroom activities
- expecting employees to “get back to work”
- creating an environment of business as usual and not giving employees a chance to apply the new skills
- misunderstanding what’s involved in skill development and the essential role of the manager in reinforcing new skills.

### ■ *Preparing Managers*

You can help overcome the reluctance of direct managers to accept their coaching role by communicating clear expectations. Ideally, coaching and developing direct reports will become formal aspects of a manager’s responsibilities. These expectations can be incorporated into manager competencies, leadership assessments, job descriptions, performance review parameters, roles and functions manuals, and other administrative documents. For help establishing expectations, see the sidebar *Manager’s Leadership Checklist*.

## Learning Triangle

Performance improvement must be an ongoing process in which three key influencers—trainers, learners, and learners’ managers—cooperate to promote employee development as an aspect of everyday work. This partnership is visualized as a “learning triangle.”



When managers aren’t involved, program participants are left without the support, encouragement, and coaching they need to persist during the challenging period of reinforcement. This shortfall is the norm in most organizations, which in large part explains why training so often fails to transfer to improved on-the-job performance.

## Manager's Leadership Checklist

Use this checklist to inform, instruct, empower, assess, and hold managers accountable for their responsibilities in coaching and developing direct reports in the workplace.

- Communicate with trainers about direct reports' performance, participation in developmental programs, and reinforcement activities.
- Attend, audit, or review direct reports' courses to prepare for setting an example of the skills to be learned; if this is not possible, review course materials including agendas and learning objectives.
- Meet with direct reports to evaluate performance assessment results and communicate expectations for performance improvement.
- During training, refrain from contacting direct reports about work issues.
- After training, meet with direct reports to evaluate learning experiences, set performance improvement goals, and plan for ongoing reinforcement.
- Give assignments that require using new skills on the job.
- Provide encouragement.
- Discuss "coaching moments" with direct reports—help them integrate the lessons of experience while applying new skills.
- Give direct reports time to meet with trainers, co-participants, mentors, and others who can contribute to learning.
- Meet with direct reports to review the results of post-course feedback surveys and update plans for ongoing reinforcement.
- Hold self and direct reports accountable for achieving performance improvement goals.

Monitoring and encouraging improved performance may be a vital leadership role, but many managers feel unprepared for it. If managers haven't previously been expected to take responsibility for the day-to-day development of subordinates, look for off-the-shelf coaching courses to fill this need. The most effective courses will give a realistic explanation of what it takes to change behavior, as well as the manager's responsibilities for coaching and improving performance. Also, nearly every manager needs practice in facilitating one-on-one discussions with subordinates to help them learn from both success and shortfall experiences. To learn more, see the sidebar *Seize the Coaching Moment*.

## Integrate Follow-Up

To expect improved performance from an isolated training event defies everything we know about behavior change. To achieve lasting changes in behavior, organizations need to take a different approach. Developmental programs need to be preceded by assessment and followed by an extended period of reinforcement, which includes

- ongoing learning
- coaching
- follow-up assessment
- accountability.

These activities should be conceived and presented as a single, integrated process. Integrated training materials need to include the resources that will be used during reinforcement and instructions about how to use them. Also, the training programs need to be selected based on pre-course assessment, and instructors should refer to these assessments during the course. This means that specific behavioral training objectives need to be identical to the behavioral items assessed before and after training. These assessments are important, and you can use them later to calculate ROI.

## Assessing Interpersonal Skills

Performance tests are a straightforward assessment method for most technical and administrative skill areas. However, most jobs also involve interpersonal skills that can be hard to measure. These skills include

- team communication
- leadership
- sales
- instruction
- negotiation.

The most effective method of assessing interpersonal behaviors is multi-source feedback, in which participants receive information about their performance from the people who work around them. To create tailored assessments that are aligned with what actually happens in the workplace and with course objectives, an organization needs to use a highly customizable survey technology. Also, to support post-course measurement, the system will need to enable low-cost repeat assessments.

## Insist on Accountability

Like an investment in new equipment, technology, or advertising, it's fair that executives expect their considerable investment in training and development programs to produce tangible, measurable results. To gain their support for future developmental programs, trainers need to provide credible proof of improved performance and return-on-investment.

### ■ *Individual Performance ROI*

Rather than pursue “business results ROI,” which is the quest to isolate the impact of training among many other contributing factors, focus on an “individual performance ROI,” the financial return you get from actual improvements in performance. This technique addresses the two questions of most interest to executives:

1. Did the training work—did people improve their performance?
2. Was the investment worth it—did these improvements outweigh the costs?

## Seize the Coaching Moment

A coaching moment occurs whenever someone applies a new skill in the workplace, so recognizing this moment is particularly important for direct managers. The purpose of engaging an employee in a discussion about a workplace experience is to help the individual learn from the event, whether it be a success or a shortfall.

When a manager learns that a direct report has had an opportunity to apply a new skill, he or she should encourage the individual to talk about the experience. Carefully avoiding an instructional approach, the manager should guide the employee to think about what happened by asking leading questions such as the ones listed below. Using these open-ended questions as a guide, the skillful coach can encourage the learner to do most of the talking:

- What happened? Who did what? What was the sequence of events?
- Why did you handle it that way? What were you trying to accomplish? What helped or hindered? What led to the ultimate outcome?
- What were the consequences? What was the impact on others? What were the costs and benefits? Was anything resolved? Did the incident cause any problems?
- What did you learn from this? What would you do differently if you encountered a similar situation in the future?
- What are your next steps? What support do you need from me to be more successful?

A typical discussion may last only a few minutes but needs to be long enough to help the direct report to “connect the dots” and integrate the learning.

## Measure Performance ROI

Individual performance ROI is obtained using this formula:

$$\text{Percent ROI} = (\text{Program Benefit} - \text{Program Costs}) \times 100 \div \text{Program Costs}$$

To estimate the **costs** of an individual's training, add the program costs for trainers, assessments, materials, facilities, and time away from work, and then divide by the number of participants. In this example, assume the cost of an individual's attendance at a three-day course was \$1,600.

When calculating the **benefit** of the training, the question is how much additional productivity will an organization get for the same salary? You'll need to know the individual's total annual compensation, data showing how much the individual's performance has improved, and an estimate of how much the individual's performance affects his or her productivity.

Assume the learner's total annual compensation was \$75,000. Several weeks before the training, the participant received a benchmark diagnostic multi-source feedback assessment. To measure performance improvement, the same assessment was administered nine months after the course. The assessment scores (scale 0 to 10) increased from an average of 6.3 (before training) to 7.9 (after training).

$$(7.9 - 6.3) \div 6.3 = 25 \text{ percent improvement in performance}$$

Individual performance is only one of several productivity factors. Support, co-worker skills, reward systems, and many other factors also have an impact on productivity. Sorting this out scientifically is impractical and unnecessary. Simply ask managers to agree on a consensus estimate of the relative impact of an individual's performance on his or her productivity. In this case, management estimated that the impact was approximately 33 percent. Multiply the annual compensation times the percent improvement in performance times the percent of impact on performance and you will get the dollar value of the improved individual performance.

$$\begin{aligned} & \$75,000 \times 25 \text{ percent} \times 33 \text{ percent} \\ & = \$6,250 \text{ additional impact on productivity} \end{aligned}$$

This benefit is significantly greater than the total cost of the individual's training, which was \$1,600.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Percent ROI} &= (\$6,250 - \$1,600) \times 100 \div \$1,600 \\ &= 290 \text{ percent} \end{aligned}$$

Performing dollar calculations for this type of ROI is relatively simple. The key is to quantify the actual improvement in performance, then translate this benefit into dollars and determine whether the payoff is more than the cost. Conveniently, the data created by the pre- and post-course performance assessment comparison technique described above can be used in a simple return-on-investment calculation. See the sidebar *Measure Performance ROI* for the sample calculation.

Executives should find that this calculation provides meaningful evidence of results, and they should have no difficulty understanding how it was derived. Note that the sample calculation presented in the sidebar is based only on the first post-training measurement. If coaching, learning, feedback, and accountability continue as a routine aspect of work, the results of subsequent assessments may improve again going forward, causing the benefits and ROI to increase even further.

Once again, the performance data used in this calculation comes from the feedback assessments. A multi-source feedback survey includes the behaviors to be taught in training. Managers tell direct reports that the survey will be administered again after training. The pre-course diagnostic helps participants set quantified, behavior-based performance improvement goals. Knowing that follow-up measurements will be taken later peaks their motivation and attention going into training.

### ■ When to Evaluate

It's important not to measure post-program performance improvement too soon. It usually takes time for an individual to show improvement and mastery. Even in the best case, early attempts are awkward and results will be mixed. If surveys are conducted too soon, while learners are still struggling to master the skills and unlearn old habits, performance scores could actually drop, introducing the possibility that measurements could be misinterpreted.

A good time to administer your initial assessment is six to nine months after training. This gives learners quantitative and qualitative feedback about how they're doing as they try to improve their skills. Also, the assessment documents whether the individual has improved on-the-job performance. Since both pre-course and follow-up post-course assessments are identical, scores can be compared easily. Improved scores confirm improved performance. For ongoing measures of performance improvement, simply administer the assessment again at the 12- and 18-month marks.

### ■ *Other Considerations*

Evaluating behavior (Level 3) and measuring results (Level 4) produce hard evidence of whether programs are changing behavior. While Donald Kirkpatrick's model is often used to hold the training department accountable, it's important to remember that others share responsibility for these results:

- learners, who persist during the lengthy and sometimes frustrating period of reinforcement
- direct managers, who supervise and coach the learner while providing opportunities to apply skills in an encouraging environment
- trainers, who present behavior-based training that is optimized for skill transfer and who coordinate follow-up programs
- senior executives, who establish expectations, commit resources, promote an approach that can change behavior, and remain patient while employees ingrain new behavior patterns.

## Align Culture

Aspects of an organization's culture, policies, and systems may frustrate participants' efforts to apply what they've learned. There are many possible problems, such as project assignments that prevent application of new skills or incentives that fail to encourage desired performance. There are many possible issues, and most of the time they are aspects of the culture that have persisted and are now causing problems. If the work environment thwarts the application of new skills, there's little chance that learners will persist through the difficult period of reinforcement.

### Locating Barriers

What aspects of an organization's culture have an impact on the transfer of training? What can be done to optimize the system for performance improvement? In order for management to remove barriers in the workplace, it needs to locate them. This isn't an easy task, because problem policies and practices serve important purposes and have usually been in place a long time. Both managers and trainers are adept at sensing what's going on in the workplace, and they can report problems to management.

Perhaps the easiest way to identify these issues is to get feedback from the participants themselves after training. See the sidebar *Gauge Organizational Support for Performance Improvement* to learn more. Ideally, the survey is administered to program participants 30-60 days after they return to the workplace, when they've had time to apply their skills. The survey solicits ratings and comments about the most important aspects of organizational support for performance improvement. When enough responses have been collected, management can study the consolidated feedback and modify policies and practices accordingly.

## Gauge Organizational Support for Performance Improvement

Use this survey to assess how well organizational systems support an employee's efforts to improve performance. For maximum effectiveness, survey learning program participants 30-60 days after they return to the workplace.

*How strongly do you agree with the following statements?* (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)

- \_\_\_\_\_ My job responsibilities require me to use the skills and concepts I learned in training.
- \_\_\_\_\_ My performance goals and objectives require me to use the skills and concepts I learned in training.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I've been given assignments or tasks with opportunities to apply the skills and concepts I learned in training.
- \_\_\_\_\_ My performance review evaluates how well I'm using the skills and concepts I learned in training.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The rewards and incentives available to me motivate me to use the skills and concepts I learned in training.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Additional learning resources such as programs, videos, and books are available to help me improve how I perform the skills and concepts I learned in training.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I have regular opportunities to learn from others, to talk with co-workers, program participants, or mentors about "lessons learned" related to the skills and concepts I learned in training.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Management has made it clear that I'm expected to use the skills and concepts I learned in training.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I receive feedback from surveys that measure how much I've improved the way I perform the skills and concepts I learned in training.
- \_\_\_\_\_ My manager sets a good example for using the skills and concepts I learned in training.
- \_\_\_\_\_ My manager has told me that I'll be held accountable for using the skills and concepts I learned in training.
- \_\_\_\_\_ My manager is actively involved in my ongoing learning and development related to the skills and concepts I learned in training.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The way my manager coaches me in the workplace helps me improve the way I perform the skills and concepts I learned in training.
- \_\_\_\_\_ My department structure makes it easy for me to apply the skills and concepts I learned in training.
- \_\_\_\_\_ My organization's policies and practices encourage me to apply the skills and concepts I learned in training.
- \_\_\_\_\_ My organization gives me adequate support to help me improve the skills and concepts I learned in training.

## Gain Commitment

You may find that your organization is already doing much of what is recommended here. However, optimizing an approach to training and development typically means making changes. Be prepared for the training staff and managers to resist, even if the changes make sense and promise to increase profitability.

For example, it's natural that some managers may not want to take on what they perceive as additional responsibilities, especially if these duties involve knowledge and skills they don't have. Program participants may feel uneasy about being assessed before and after training, because this enables their managers to hold them accountable for results. The trainers themselves may feel uneasy about assessments that accurately measure whether their programs actually change behavior. Popular training programs may be eliminated as irrelevant. New technologies may be acquired. Long-standing policies and procedures may have to change.

### ■ *Be a Change Agent*

Change agents can run into a wall of denial. Often an organization has lived with pain of this kind of waste so long that it's perceived as normal. People rationalize that if world-class trainers present high-quality courses, some good has to be coming from these activities, even though behavior doesn't appear to change. Here are some common rationalizations:

- It's unreasonable to expect measurable improvements in performance.
- Improvements are too subtle to notice.
- Improved behavior will manifest itself unpredictably in the future.

Over a period of time, executives and supervisors alike can get used to the status quo. Like the proverbial frog in a pot of slowly warming water, people may not sense the problem. They have become comfortable with a bad situation that will eventually cause unacceptable pain. Executives need to confront this mindset before more damage is done. No organization wants to waste money, and while optimizing development programs can produce long-term improvements in performance and a significant return-on-investment, people may be reluctant to do things differently. Without commitment at all levels of management, the will to push past resistance simply won't be there. Tough decisions will not be made, and initiatives will be abandoned.

### ■ *Top-Level Commitment*

It can be challenging to gain attention, commitment, and action from top-level management. They may operate several layers of management removed from training and development programs. They may be preoccupied with shareholder, strategic, legal, acquisition, or succession issues and have little time for focusing on training and development. But if management doesn't make a priority of improving performance and optimizing systems to support transfer of training, nothing is likely to change.

The requisite level of commitment usually builds because top executives notice compelling business reasons for getting behind the changes. Like any major investment in infrastructure, training and development is expensive, and executives should expect measurable results. Key executives who have ownership interest or profit-and-loss responsibility will be especially concerned if resources are being wasted.

Commitment is usually sparked by a knowledgeable champion who owns responsibility for training and performance improvement, understands the issues, and wants to do something about them. After gathering data about program costs and program results, this influential person can educate key executives and gain their commitment up front.

Top-down commitment needs to be visible and demonstrative. Executives need to

- make sure managers understand why a reinforcement-intensive approach is necessary and why the organization must take new approaches to performance improvement
- communicate to managers that they are expected to function effectively as performance coaches for their direct reports, and if needed, give them training to prepare them for this role
- improve aspects of policies and practices when it's discovered that the system discourages on-the-job application of newly learned concepts and skills
- clarify expectations for improved performance and positive impacts on business results, to include measuring performance improvement, calculating ROI, and defining accountability
- acquire compatible behavior-based programs that work together seamlessly to support assessment, training, and reinforcement.

Executives have several options for getting their message across:

- meetings and briefings
- presentations by experts
- repeating the message in a variety of media: email, web, video, newsletters, and memoranda
- workshops to involve managers in optimizing the organization's approach to training and development and creating a plan for implementation
- detailed expectations incorporated into managers' job descriptions and performance reviews
- personal appearances in courses to emphasize importance
- setting an example by modeling the desired skills.

## Implement the Enhancements

Practically speaking, it's easier to gain commitment if management understands that it doesn't have to implement all eight critical enhancements at once to be successful. While many variables influence whether classroom learning is reinforced and ingrained in the workplace, it's possible to make a beginning and get positive results by focusing on three of the critical enhancements.

### Step 1. Integrate Reinforcement

Start small, and begin with a single program. You should acquire or design a training program that

- is structured to achieve specific behavioral objectives
- includes resources, such as related job aids, books, and behavior model videos, which can be used to reinforce skills after training.

Next, set up a system to assess current skill levels of the program's behavioral objectives, through observation, performance testing, or multi-rater assessment. If the latter, make sure the feedback system is easily customizable and can be repeatedly used with various subjects at minimal expense.

### Step 2. Measure Improvement

Assess performance levels about a month before and again several months after training. Make sure participants know about the assessment schedule in advance. Coach managers to help direct reports analyze the results of the assessment in order to focus on priority learning goals during the course.

After the course, assess performance again using the same behavior sets. Then compare pre-course scores with post-course scores; the quantitative and qualitative data will reveal whether areas of performance have improved. Notify learners and direct managers about whether ongoing reinforcement has had the desired effect; then they can use the results to establish a new set of developmental goals and metrics.

Measuring performance improvement provides hard evidence of whether programs are changing behavior, making it possible to hold the key players in the “learning triangle” accountable:

- learners, who must make a determined effort to change behavior patterns
- direct managers, who monitor and coach the direct reports
- trainers, who present behavior-based training that is optimized for skill transfer.

### Step 3. Involve Direct Managers

Changing behavior patterns takes months, not days—even in ideal circumstances. Only the learner’s direct manager is in a position to give enough support, oversight, encouragement, feedback, coaching, and reinforcement over the long term to change behavior. No matter how much was invested in the learning program, how well the manager carries out this role will make or break the transfer of new knowledge and skills into permanent improvements in workplace performance.

At a minimum, you’ll need to do three things to draw direct managers into a “learning triangle” with their direct reports and trainers:

1. Inform managers of their developmental responsibilities. Have them review the sidebar *Manager’s Leadership Checklist*, and then let them know they will be held accountable for those actions.
2. Prepare direct managers to be more effective performance coaches. If needed, make coaching training available. At a minimum, give them a book about coaching for managers.
3. Hold managers accountable for carrying out their role as performance coaches. Define expectations in job descriptions and performance evaluation systems.

Using this simplified strategy for getting started will immediately enrich the way you conduct training programs, and you will experience positive results. However, it’s only a beginning. Each of the eight critical areas deals with significant cause-and-effect shortfalls and opportunities, none of which should be ignored. Your organization will need to build on the foundation of initial successes with a tailored strategy to optimize the other key areas that influence learning transfer.

The transfer of training issue has always been the human resource development community’s biggest problem and biggest opportunity. If applied, this summary of how skills are ingrained and practical methods for transferring classroom instruction to improved workplace performance can help you create a huge success story in your organization. See the job aid *Monitor Key Actions*.

Obviously, there’s no quick fix. In most organizations, a lot of work will need to be done. How far you go to create lasting improvements in performance and positive impacts on business outcomes will depend on the degree to which you and management acknowledge the pain that comes from committing resources to programs that fail to achieve the expected results.

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Lynn S. Lewis, MBA, PMP, CPLP  
 President  
 Learning Solutions, LLC

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## Monitor Key Actions

To ensure that training produces permanent, measurable results in the workplace, key participants should be monitored before, during, and after training has occurred. Use this checklist to plan, track, and evaluate actions of key role players: trainers, learners, and direct managers.

### Before Training

This time should be used to assess current skills and prepare for the upcoming training.

#### Trainers

- Acquire, design, or review and update courses to ensure they incorporate learning strategies that promote retention and learning transfer.
- Send managers and learners information about pre-course benchmark individual diagnostic surveys.
- Administer pre-course individual benchmark diagnostic surveys and send confidential reports to participants (complete feedback) and their direct managers (summary).
- Distribute pre-course learning materials to participants and course information to learners' direct managers, including performance improvement and business results objectives, course content, and schedule.

#### Managers

- Review course materials and meet with direct reports to discuss forthcoming training programs: benchmark diagnostic scores, developmental priorities, relevance to workplace shortfalls, impact on business results, course content, boss's support role, arrangements to cover responsibilities, expectations, post-course reinforcement planning, and assessment activities.
- Meet with direct reports to discuss forthcoming benchmark diagnostic survey: what, why, who, when, how.
- Review, audit, or attend the course to prepare for setting a positive example.

#### Learners

- Complete pre-course assignments, focusing on personal learning and performance improvement goals.

### During Training

It's important that the learners receive support while they are in training; also, they should be prepared for reinforcement.

#### Trainers

- Facilitate programs, implementing training strategies that promote retention and learning transfer.
- Brief learners about follow-up learning resources and help them set up learning support networks.

#### Managers

- Take care of learners' responsibilities and protect participants from work-related issues.

#### Learners

- Focus on priority goals for improving performance, participate in skill-building exercises, and make plans for follow-up application and reinforcement.

### After Training

This time should be used to reinforce skills and ensure that learners are able to apply their new skills on the job.

#### Trainers

- Publicize and recognize successful course completion.
- Make online behavior-modeling videos and other learning resources available to participants.
- Host "brown-bag" learning lunches and other discussion groups.
- Administer brief feedback projects when participants want anonymous, ongoing feedback from team members.

*(Continued on next page)*

## Job Aid

### Monitoring Key Actions (continued)

#### After Training (continued)

##### Trainers (continued)

- Assist in calculating return-on-investment.
- Administer a repeat post-course individual skills assessment and send results to learners (complete feedback) and learners' managers (summary).

##### Managers

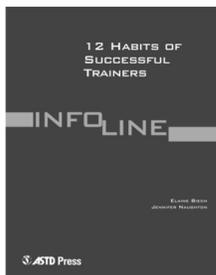
- Meet with learners to discuss the course experience, set goals, and plan for applying and reinforcing new skills.
- Set an example for desired behavior.
- Provide projects, assignments, and other opportunities to apply newly learned skills.
- Monitor workplace performance, give feedback, and offer encouragement, as appropriate.
- Meet with direct reports to discuss successes and frustrations and to help them learn from work experiences.
- Meet with direct reports to compare pre-course and post-course feedback assessment results, update performance improvement goals, and adjust plans for follow-up reinforcement.
- Exercise patience as they await evidence of improved performance and positive impacts on business results.

##### Learners

- Brief team members about course objectives and content, major lessons learned, and plans for follow-up reinforcement as well as request ongoing feedback and support.
- Complete a survey about the organization's support for performance improvement, one to two months after the program.
- Stay in contact with trainers, course participants, and mentors, who share experiences, insights, feedback, and encouragement.

## BASICS OF TRAINING

If you're looking for practical, concise information to help you develop powerful training, there's no better resource than ASTD's *Infoline*. Whether you've recently entered the training profession, want to hone your skills, or need to train new trainers, you'll find these how-to issues indispensable. The *Infolines* below will help to ease the anxiety and stress of training, give you the basics in a timely manner, and provide you with the skills to enter the training world as a seasoned professional.



### 12 Habits of Successful Trainers

Apply proven theories, models, and processes to help make you a successful trainer.

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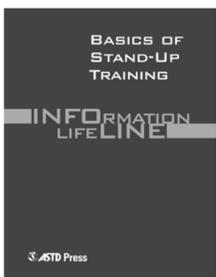


### Accelerated Learning

Examine the principles, process, and techniques of accelerated learning and how to use them to improve the learning environment.

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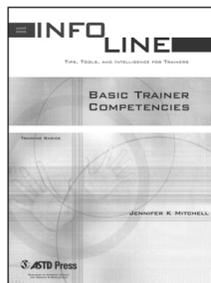


### Basics of Stand-Up Training

Your lifesaver issue—presented here is a step-by-step process that helps you prepare content so learners “get it,” along with tips for setting up classroom facilities that support your program.

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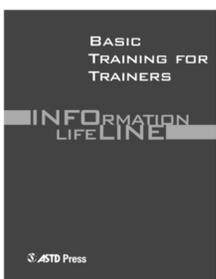


### Basic Trainer Competencies

Based on the ASTD Competency Model™ this issue focuses on foundational competencies for trainers. Focused on the needs of the trainer continually striving to improve his or her skills, this issue presents ways to develop and demonstrate competencies on the job.

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### Basic Training for Trainers

Use this basic guide to quickly get up to speed on adult learning theories, training styles, presentation techniques, and facilitation ideas.

**Print Product Code:** 258808

**PDF Product Code:** 758808



### Do's and Don'ts for New Trainers

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f: 703.683.8103 www.astd.org

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