

Training Transfer - Insight to Action (Aug 11)

5 tips to increase training transfer.

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By Dave Basarab

One of the issues training and development professionals continually face is whether our participants have successfully transferred learned skills to the job. In other words, have they taken the insight they gained in training and turned it into action that is meaningful to them, their teams, and their company? Working for (and with) Fortune 500 global training functions, I have developed a set of approaches (tips) that when implemented have the opportunity to significantly increase training transfer. Here are a few for your consideration.

Tip #1: Practice, Practice, Practice

The old adage of practice makes perfect is true in our programs. When designing our courses for maximum transfer, consider that for every 1 minute of content delivered, design in a minimum of 3 minutes of practice. Highly transferable training gives participants large amounts of time to practice what we want them to do on the job. Our participants need to exercise those newly acquired skills so “muscle memory” takes over when they really need it. Another benefit is that our programs provide a safe haven for trial and error of new techniques. New skills that are not adequately practiced have lesser chances of being transferred.

In one leadership program for first-time managers, when we redesigned the course from 80 percent lecture to 80 percent practice, the company realized an increase in transfer from 22 percent to 71 percent. Same content, just intently practiced. The new design had minimal PowerPoint slides and 30 minutes of lecture over a two-day period. I suggest that you set a minimum ratio of 3 to 1. For every 1 minute of content, include at least 3 minutes of practice. I like more than 3 to 1, but consider setting this as the minimum design ratio.

Tip #2: Let Them Know What You Expect

Show expected on-the-job performance before, during, and after content and practice. Left to their own devices, participants will form judgments on how to implement learned skills, which may be different than what we envisioned. Simply explain the adoptive behaviors the company wants—and do this early and often. Don't just spotlight what they will learn but also what they can do with these key learnings. This simple practice has a remarkable success rate.

For example, one company was teaching effective meeting management to its supervisors to use in their morning briefings. At the beginning of class, the division head always described the components of an effective meeting and when to use them. The company had coined the term, “Gold Standard Meetings” (GSM), to represent the application of the new skill. Signs were strewn through the class with the Gold Standard Meeting title and listed the skills to be used when running these meetings. The GSM skills were reinforced at the end of each class and were part of the vice president's closing remarks.

Tip #3: Incorporate Reflective Practice

Reflective practice enables participants to learn from their experience. This is used when participants have completed activities such as simulations or practice sessions. Reflection is a way of helping participants better understand what they know and do. And, as they develop their knowledge and skill through reconsidering, they can reflect on what they've learned. Reflection places an emphasis on learning through questioning and investigation, leading to a development of understanding and increasing transfer to the job.

I place the model at logical places within the learning material (classroom or e-learning) and have the participant answer each question reflecting on what was just taught. At times, I have them share with others in class. You can do this multiple times throughout the program—then have participants review their reflective practice answers in preparation for developing their action plans.

Tip #4: Do Action Planning

Action planning is a set of clearly written statements describing—in measurable terms—the specific actions the participant intends to apply on the job as a result of training. In preparing this, the participant is drawing up a personal transfer plan before leaving training, thinking about how, where, and when to match the new skills to concrete situations on the job. This goal-setting strategy enhances the likelihood of transfer. Once back at work and confronted with e-mails, phone calls, meetings, and problems, the participant's intention to adopt is negatively impacted—few participants take time in the two or three days after training to think about how they will use what they have just learned and practiced.

Provide the goal-planning sheet in the participant materials, along with notes for the instructor, explaining the purpose of the activity, how to introduce it, how much time to allocate, and criteria for acceptable action items. Allocate time at the end of the program to write goals. As a rule of thumb, participants need 15 to 30 minutes to write two goals.

Tip #5: Hold Teleconference and/or Webcasts to Inform Managers About the Course

Providing managers with a thorough understanding of the course allows them to send the right employees at the right time. It also aids them in conducting the pre-course conversations and begins their involvement of supporting their employees post-training. In these sessions, consider covering the following:

- Business purpose of the course
- What their employees will learn
- How the knowledge and skills will benefit their employees and their organization (team results)
- Who should attend
- When they should attend
- Why they should attend
- What the manager can do to support the employees before and after the course

These sessions are typically 30-minute teleconferences or Webcasts and can be recorded and made available to managers who could not attend or need to review.

Summary

While there is no magic bullet that will always turn insight to action, we can help the process along—at a very reasonable cost. In the end, success isn't about how many people we train, but how many we've moved to action.

Dave Basarab is an experienced evaluator and author who has led strategic training initiatives for companies such as NCR, Motorola, Pitney Bowes, and Ingersoll Rand. He recently launched his new book, "Predictive Evaluation," a ground-breaking approach to training and evaluation and follow-up to his previous book, "The Training Evaluation Process." This book can be a valuable resource for companies that struggle to define training's success, fight to justify training's value to their organization, or view training as an expense rather than an investment with predicted return.