

Throwing the Baby Out with the Bath Water - Should instructor-led training be tossed? (Apr 13)

By: Bobby Butler, April 9, 2013



Editor's note: This article is part one of a three-part series. This segment discusses how the idiom "don't throw the baby out with the bath water" is analogous to threats to toss instructor-led training. Additionally, the seven problems inherent in using traditional instructor-led training today and how ILT's problems impact training's stakeholders are discussed.

Instructor-led training has been badmouthed, maligned and outright threatened of extinction for a number of years. Not because it is bad at its core, but due to the many problems surrounding it.

But, is the criticism warranted? Not really.

There have always been calls for replacing traditional instructor-led training (ILT), whether it was computer-based training in the 70's and 80's, distant-learning in the 90's or e-learning and mobile learning today. And, although it has taken a significant hit over the years, ILT is still the most prevalent form of formal training in the workplace.

So, how about our squelching all of the hoopla about it being tossed and fixing its problems instead?

"Don't throw the baby out with the bath water"

During the 16th century, people did not bathe daily and only did so once or twice a year. But, when people did bathe, each member of the family would take turns utilizing the same pan or tub of water. It began with the father bathing himself first and then his son or sons, then the women—mother, then daughter(s), and finally, the baby of the family.

As you can well imagine that when it came time to bathe the baby, the water was so dirty that the baby, it was said, could have been lost in it. And because this was a time well before indoor plumbing, the dirty water would be unceremoniously tossed into the yard once the "wash party" was over. Therefore, "don't throw out the baby with the bath water" became a common cautionary saying during that time. Since then, it has become an idiomatic expression to suggest that one should avoid the error of eliminating something good when trying to get rid of something bad.

So, picture ILT as the baby, while the numerous problems (resulting largely from ILT's unchanged, non-malleable mid 20th century design structure) represent the dirty water. And, ask yourself if you want to rid yourself of ILT, or the problems surrounding it (as a result of the continuous use of traditional instructor-led training, essentially as is, in today's 21st century workplace environment)?

My guess is the latter and therefore, an honest discussion is in order.

Let's start by identifying the seven problems inherent in using traditional instructor-led training programs today:

- Time away from the job
- Information overload
- Formal and passive deliveries
- Poor transferability
- Insufficient ability to measure impact
- Logistical inflexibilities
- Cost-inefficiencies

These problems have gotten progressively worse over time, especially in today's 21st century workplace. Moreover, they cause many participants, operational leaders and training professionals to come to believe that ILT is an outdated mode of training, since all three stakeholders have been negatively impacted by some or all seven problems.

For example:

Four Problems Impacting Participants

- Time away from the job. Participants either do not want or can't afford to be away from their jobs even for a day to attend training. And, those who are of the younger two generations do not generally have the patience to sit through lengthy-duration training formats.
- Information overload. Given how overburdened workers are today, participants' tolerance for handling too much information is very low and therefore, they are apt to avoid, if not outright dismiss, training content that overloads them.
- Formal and passive deliveries. It has long been known that adults learn best when actively engaged in training and that formal and passive training deliveries leave many participants bored and uninterested.
- Poor transferability. Participants have expectations just like operational leaders and training professionals. They too, want their training to be timely, relevant, insightful, practical and useful. However, there is a high potential that the information will not be absorbed or effectively transferred back on the job if training is too long, or if there is too much information that is being delivered much too formally and/or passively.

Three Problems Impacting Operational Leaders

- Time away from the job. Operational managers and leaders consistently express concerns about employees being in training and away from their jobs because of the negative impact on productivity. And, given how lean most organizations operate today, this is a growing issue for leaders at all levels.
- Insufficient ability to measure impact. Given how almost singularly focused organizations have generally become regarding cost control, training has increasingly been under budgetary scrutiny more than ever before. As a result, many operational leaders, whether having direct or indirect profit and loss responsibility, have been demanding—but not consistently receiving—measurable proof of the impact of training on their teams, departments, divisions and organizations.
- Cost-inefficiencies. Since operational leaders' demands for proving the impact of training cannot be sufficiently met, many have also become preoccupied with its cost-inefficiencies. And, since much of the training cost is "indirect" and difficult to identify and quantify, managing it is a frustration more now than at any other time.

Seven Problems Impact Training Professionals

- Time away from the job. Training professionals too, have to deal with the issue of time away from the job; principally because they are regularly lambasted by both participants and operational leaders over it.

- Information overload, formal and passive deliveries and poor transferability. Like participants, training professionals have these concerns, too. They understand, perhaps more than anyone, there is little to no benefit to participants or organizations when their training initiatives fail to engage during training and when it isn't properly deployed afterwards.
- Insufficient ability to measure impact, cost-inefficiencies. Training professionals concerns heighten each time management seeks proof of the impact of training on participants, job performance and/or the organization. Moreover, stress levels rises exponentially when they are required to justify the cost of their training initiatives.
- Logistical inflexibilities. Training professionals constantly deal with logistical issues; whether related to the allocation of personnel, facilities, equipment and/or props.

The problems inherent in using traditional instructor-led training today are pervasive and impact all stakeholders. However, given its long-tenured utility, I contend that before we get rid of ILT (throwing the baby out..., if you will), we fix the problems and make ILT much more workable and impactful for today's workplace by making revolutionary changes.

The question now is, how? This shall be discussed in the article's next two installments.

This is Part One of a three-part series. This segment discussed:

- How the idiom "don't throw the baby out with the bath water" is analogous to threats to toss ILT
- The seven problems inherent in using traditional instructor-led training today
- How ILT's problems impact training's stakeholders
 - Participants
 - Operational leaders
 - Training professionals

Part Two will be available on May 16. It discusses:

- Four of the six attributes of a revolutionary systems approach to ILT that fix its problems
 - Building a training system. Not a program
 - Establishing a platform better suited for today
 - Standardizing delivery timeframe and format
 - Using a participant-centric training approach
 - How to make ILT more workable and impactful for today's workplace

*About the Author: Bobby L. Butler is CEO of **IMPACT60** Learning Systems™, LLC. He is creator of the **60 MINUTES for IMPACT™** Workshops Training Platform: a revolutionary approach to instructor-led training which addresses the seven (7) problems inherent in traditional training programs' platforms. He can be reached at blb@impact60learning.com. Learn about **IMPACT60** at www.impact60learning.com.*