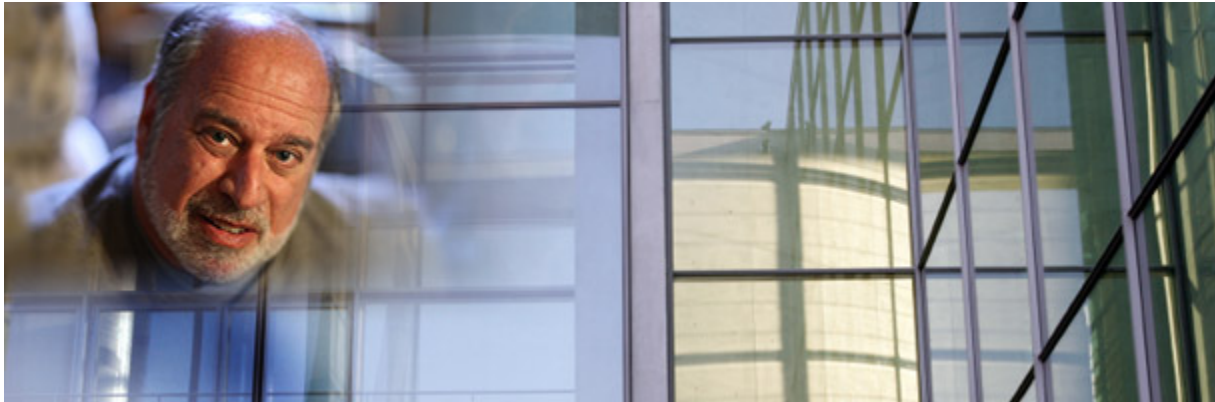


## Training Sees a Shrink (May 14)



by Marc Rosenberg

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Training: I know I've made a difference; that's why I don't understand why I seem to be losing respect. No one even calls me by my name anymore. All of a sudden, the "T" word is bad. People call me "learning," or the "learning organization," or "performance improvement." Even ASTD no longer uses the word "training" in its name. But at the end of the day, most of the time it's still training that people want, and it's still training that I do. So why am I getting such a bad rap?

For my 50<sup>th</sup> column (yikes!), with tongue-in-cheek, I got to thinking about what it might be like if the training department sat down for a session with a therapist...

Therapist      Ah, Training, come in, come in. Have a seat there on the couch, or lie down if you like.  
*Training*      *Doc, I'd just like to stand here, in front of you, in the front of the room.*

Therapist      Training, you're being silly. You're not teaching right now; you'll just be uncomfortable.  
*Training*      *You're right Doc. I tell you what. You stand up here and I'll sit in front of you so you can tell me what to do. Can you use a flip chart? I'm very comfortable with flip charts.*

Therapist      I don't think that's a good idea. Remember why you came to see me; you're trying to branch out in new directions. Let's not go back to the way it was. Why don't we just both sit on these nice comfy chairs and chat, OK?

*Training*      *Fine, but wait ... before we start, what are the objectives?*

Therapist      The what?

*Training*      *You know, at the end of this session, what will I be able to do that I can't do now?*

Therapist      I don't think that would be worthwhile in a therapy session.  
*Training*      *I have to tell you Doc that I don't think this is starting real well. I have to know precisely what I/we will be doing every moment. I don't understand how you can help me in this session without both of us knowing, in advance, what the outcomes will be.*

Therapist      I think that's something we'll discover as we move along. You're my patient; you have to trust me. OK? Now, tell me what's bothering you.

*Training*      *Well, Doc, I feel like I'm losing my mojo.*

Therapist      Really? Why do you think that? You haven't been eliminated from the budget again, have you?

*Training*      *Why? Have you heard something? They always cut me right after they cut travel and free coffee. But I'm always the last to know. Tell me! Tell me! I just knew it; they're reorganizing me again, right? What do you know? Why won't you tell me?*

Therapist      Relax, Training. Don't be so paranoid. I've heard nothing.  
*Training*      *Whew! You'd tell me if something was up, wouldn't you?*

Therapist  
Training Of course I would. Now, what's going on?  
*Not sure. I know I've made a difference; that's why I don't understand why I seem to be losing respect. No one even calls me by my name anymore. All of a sudden, the "T" word is bad. People call me "learning," or the "learning organization," or "performance improvement." Even ASTD no longer uses the word "training" in its name. But at the end of the day, most of the time it's still training that people want, and it's still training that I do. So why am I getting such a bad rap? Why do I feel like I'm being marginalized?*

Therapist Perhaps the word "training" is associated with a bad experience people had with you. But it might also be that your profession is moving forward; could it be that learning is now seen as more than just training? It's also possible that you and the business are talking past each other, or a sign of maturity of your stakeholders. Have you thought about these things? Maybe you should bring the business with you to our next session; couples counseling can be very helpful, you know.

Training *Sorry, Doc, I couldn't follow. Do you have all of this in a handout or participant guide? You know no one says "student guide" anymore.*

Therapist Sorry, no student ... I mean participant guide. You need to create your own learning path.

Training *"Learning path?" What the heck is a learning path?*

Therapist Never mind. We'll cover that in another session. But I do understand that when everything is not spoon-fed to you, it becomes more of a challenge to learn.

Training *I know. But it's been so easy up till now. Students come into my classrooms and my instructors tell them lots of stuff, show them a bunch of slides, and then they practice some things that seem to make them happy. I like happy. I ask them how happy they are every day and especially at the end of class. If they're not happy, if they complain, I get into trouble. So happy is important. Happy students keep the company off my back.*

Therapist But Training, are you happy?

Training *To tell you the truth, not so much lately. Besides losing my identity, I see all of this learning technology coming in. All of a sudden, everything has to be eLearning, and I have to learn all of this IT stuff.*

Therapist So you're not a fan of technology in learning?

Training *There you go with that "learning" thing again. It's "training," damn it, TRAINING!*

Therapist Calm down. For now, let's forget what it's called. Please continue with what you were saying.

Training *So all I hear about is how technology will improve my efficiency. I think it's a cover for a big downsizing. If there are no courses to teach, what am I going to do? Besides, I've tried it. Management loves it because it appears to take people less time to complete and saves a lot of money. But let me let you in on my dirty little secret. Some of the stuff I do is OK, but most of my eLearning is not so good, and I'm being polite. I've seen some examples of great eLearning, but I don't have anywhere near the resources, time, expertise, or support to pull it off. So I just pump out a lot of basic stuff and pray that some of it sticks.*

Therapist You mean you don't evaluate it?

Training *Sure I do. Like I told you, I ask the students if they like it, if they're happy. And then I give them a brief test at the end. The data goes into my LMS where it gets published in reports that nobody reads.*

Therapist Sounds like your heart is not really invested in eLearning.

Training *Well, I'd like to be. But honestly, for me, change is hard. I feel like a battleship trying to turn around in a bathtub.*

Therapist Maybe you should do some strategic planning. Have you thought about where you want to be in two years?

Training *Nope. No time. Too busy building courses. Got lots of clients who want training, and I have to deliver what they want or they won't pay me. Why, just the other day a client asked me to reduce my leadership course by one day, and another client asked me to lengthen the same course by one day. That's two more projects I have to do, and more courses I'll have to manage. I'm exhausted.*

Therapist Maybe we can alleviate your exhaustion by some alternative approaches. What about some innovations like mLearning, performance support, knowledge management, simulations and games, communities of practice, and social learning?

Training *All "flavors of the month," if you ask me. Just a few years ago, I went nuts over something called "Second Life." Where did that get me? Besides, I have closets full of old technology gizmos that no one uses anymore. Hey, can I interest you in a dozen slightly used videodisc players?*

Therapist Don't you think it's important to embrace these new ideas?

Training *Are you crazy, Doc? When am I supposed to do that? I'm up to my eyeballs just trying to keep all the training going.*

Therapist But maybe you shouldn't be doing all that training so you would have more time and resources for these new opportunities. There are other, often better ways to improve performance, you know.

Training *OMG, don't let anyone hear you say that! You might be right, but people who say that just disappear; they vanish, never to be heard from again.*

Therapist I mean ... I've heard that some training organizations are moving some of their efforts more toward informal learning.

Training *Huh?*

Therapist You know, where the employees use tools, resources, and each other, in the workplace, to collaborate and learn what they need to perform their jobs better, precisely when they need to know it, without the reliance on so much formal courseware.

Training *Makes sense, but it's not my job. That's the responsibility of front-line management. They look to me for courses; that's what I do.*

Therapist I'm not sure we are getting anywhere.

Training *Really? I thought this was quite helpful. I feel much better now. It's been very interactive, so I'm sure I learned something. One more question. Recently I've seen a lot of people from building services walking around my floor – measuring, pointing and counting things. They say they are upgrading our space, but I'm not so sure. What do you think?*

Therapist Well, I see our hour is up. It's been great talking to you, Training. Shall I schedule you for another session?