

HOW TO GET THE MOST (FOR YOURSELF) FROM TRAINING

WHY TRAINING? WHY NOW?

If training is not important to a particular job today, that job probably will not be important much longer, either. What makes training such a big deal?

First, today's organizations are under great pressure to provide increasingly higher levels of quality, service and value. All that demands new skills, and good training builds those skills best.

Second, job experience alone doesn't cut it anymore. People used to rely on time and experience to build the skills they needed to succeed. Today, things are changing too fast for that. Years of experience can become outdated overnight. As famed UCLA basketball coach John Wooden put it, "It's what you learn after you know it all that counts." Fortunately, good training can build needed skills quickly.

The good news for you and your organization is: Training works! Good training builds new skills that enable employees to be more effective under changing, increasingly challenging conditions. That

is true for managers, team leaders and team members, individual contributors, professionals and executives.

This report is designed to help you get the most for yourself from the vital skills-building training available to you.

THE CONDITIONS FOR MAXIMUM TRAINING PAYOFFS

Two conditions are needed to get the maximum personal payoffs from training:

1. The facilitator needs to be competent and needs to use sound, results-oriented materials and processes.
2. You need to invest yourself heavily in your own training.

Not surprisingly, your personal investment in your own training is the most important of these two conditions. That's because an unmotivated person won't learn from even the world's best program,



Traditional Schooling Habits	The Skills-Building Approach
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take a short-term view; survive it • Be a relatively passive participant • Do as little as required • Shelve your personal experience • Show off what you know, and hide what you don't know • Be theoretical • Memorize, recite, forget • The class grade is the end of it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take a long-term view; use it • Be an active participant • Do as much as possible • Build on your personal experience • Learn what you need to know and work to fill skill gaps • Be practical • Practice, use, retain • The end of class is just the beginning of it

and a motivated person will learn a great deal, even from a below-average training session.

YOUR PERSONAL INVESTMENT

A major part of the investment you need to make in your own training is a good skills-building approach. This approach is very different from the habits most of us learned in grammar school, high school or college.

The comparison above points out how very different the two approaches are. Using traditional school habits in organizational skills training situations will only get you a small bit of the potential training value offered.

The following techniques offer a proven skills-building approach. They will help you get the most for yourself from training.

We urge you to test all of these techniques, and make habits of the ones that pay off best for you.

USE THE SKILLS-BUILDING PROCESS

Before the program—don't let training just happen to you.

- Find out all you can about the training program you are about to attend.
- Complete pre-class work thoroughly.
- Get your workload in order before you go to the training program.

During the program—Get actively involved.

- Get to know the people in class.
- Help create a constructive learning atmosphere.
 - Be active.
 - Listen actively to others.
 - Be positive.
 - Be on time, and be prepared.

- Be willing to try new things.
- Be willing to practice.
- Help make positive mid-course corrections.
- Build a solid plan for back-on-the-job implementation.

After the program—Stay focused on mastering the skills.

- Involve others.
- Implement your plan.
- Be willing to break old habits.
- Stick to it.
- Follow up.
- Give yourself credit where credit is due.

BEFORE THE PROGRAM

ACTIONS THAT WILL MAXIMIZE YOUR PERSONAL PAYOFFS FROM TRAINING

Don't let the training just happen to you. Training requires action on your part; it is not something that happens to people. It is not like watching a game on television; it's more like being one of the players in the middle of the action. In fact, it's even more like being in the vital practices before the game. It is in those strenuous practice sessions that players learn to excel so they can succeed in the real game.

Find out all you can about the training program you are about to attend. What are its objectives? Why are you involved? What is expected of you? If you can, get information from your manager, the facilitator or trusted colleagues who have attended the same program or who are knowledgeable about it. Know what to expect and what will be expected of you.

Complete pre-class work thoroughly. Many training programs have pre-class work. Do these assignments thoughtfully. Become an expert in the materials. If something is not clear, call the facilitator or your manager, or seek out other people who can help. Get started right.

Get your workload in order before you go to the training program. On the first morning, he rushed in the back door of the classroom about 10 minutes late, struggling with a heavy briefcase full of paperwork and phone messages he needed to complete while in class. He hadn't cleaned up his work to make room for the training program, although he had plenty of notice. He was hoping for some "down time" in class to sneak in other work. By the end of the week, he was a wreck, with neither his regular work nor his learning done very well.

Training takes concentration. In preparation, clean up your regular work and clear your mind. That's not easy for anyone, but it can be done. You'll need to manage yourself and those around you at work (perhaps even your own manager) to be sure you have the time to focus on the training.

DURING THE PROGRAM

ACTIONS THAT WILL MAXIMIZE YOUR PERSONAL PAYOFFS FROM TRAINING

Get actively involved. Get to know the people in class. Your colleagues in the training program are a rich source of learning for you. Use them as sounding boards and for mutual support. Be sure to rely on those who want to learn. Make a special effort to learn from new acquaintances, not just from old colleagues.

Help create a constructive learning atmosphere. Your behavior influences the tone and quality of what you and others accomplish in class.

- Be active. Ask questions when something is not clear. Give your opinion when your contribution will help. Take a stand when your conclusions are appropriate.
- Listen actively to others. Seek to really understand them. Encourage others to participate and allow them their fair share of air time.
- Be positive. Use your influence to push for constructive outcomes. Remain open to new ideas. People who concentrate on finding fault just bog everyone down. Take a “let’s-give-it-a-chance” approach for your own benefit and for those around you.
- Be on time, and be prepared. Delaying things cuts into everyone’s opportunities.

Be willing to try new things. The facilitator may ask you to consider a new idea or to try a new approach. Give it a fair chance. Use the scientific method: Test out new ideas by trying them out first before deciding to accept or reject them. If the experiment works, you’ll gain something of value to use back on the job. If the experiment doesn’t work, you can leave it in the classroom and return to your tried-and-true ways.

Be willing to practice. “Talking about it” or “thinking about it” helps, but new skills truly are developed only through practice. That’s true in athletics, and it’s just as true in organizations. The tennis player who wants to learn a two-handed

backhand, after years of swinging one-handed, will have to practice many hours to master that new behavior. New on-the-job skills require such devoted practice.

Even if it’s a little uncomfortable at first, don’t give up. You would not want to fly with a pilot who refused to practice critical cockpit skills in a simulator before roaring your airliner off into the sky. Treat your own skills development with the same importance.

You must practice somewhere if you’re going to master new skills. Practicing during training costs less and risks less than practicing on the job, where the stakes are much higher.

Help make positive mid-course corrections. When things are progressing well in class, give positive reinforcement through your words and actions.

If things seem off course, do something positive about it. Ask for an appointment with the facilitator to talk about what’s going well for you, what seems to need improvement, and what changes are suggested. Be open with your feedback. And be open to hearing the facilitator’s perspective. (The learning process often has some moments at the beginning or in the middle when things may seem a little confusing or unstructured. Give the learning process a fair chance.)

The odds are that your feedback will help things work better. However, once you’ve given your honest opinion, return actively to the learning at hand. Don’t try to be a participant and compete with or second-guess the facilitator at the same time. Give your mid-course correction feedback, let it go, and

put your energies back into making the most of the opportunities in front of you.

Build a solid plan for back-on-the-job implementation. Two professors who taught in a prominent executive training program decided to find out how many of their participants actually used the new techniques they learned. The professors surveyed hundreds of participants going back over several years of the program. When they found someone who was using the new techniques, they asked, “When did you start using these new ideas?” They discovered that in every case where the skills were being used, the person had started using the new techniques within two weeks of finishing up their training program. If people waited longer than that, the wait usually became forever, no matter how good their intentions.

Make specific plans about how to implement the training within the first few days back on the job. Design your plan while you are still in the training program. Write down the specific action steps you will take. Put reminders in your calendar. Don’t make your list so long that it only discourages you. Write down just the key techniques that will really pay off for you.

AFTER THE PROGRAM

ACTIONS THAT WILL MAXIMIZE YOUR PERSONAL PAYOFFS FROM TRAINING

Stay focused on mastering the skills. Involve others. It’s hard to build new skills without support, encouragement and constructive feedback. Pilots, doctors, writers, carpenters, speakers, mechanics and scientists all benefit from the support and feedback of others to help master new skills. That’s

just as true for people in all types of jobs and at all organizational levels.

Think of people such as managers or coworkers who can help you put into practice what you have learned. If including these people isn’t practical or realistic for you, get support and feedback from someone else who has learned the skills.

Implement your plan. As suggested earlier, begin your implementation as quickly as possible. Do it in small steps, a little every day. A supervisor decided to master the skill of giving more positive feedback to people she worked with. She became remarkably effective at it, but she began in small ways, first by doing nothing more than saying “thanks” to people. Later, she expanded the skill into telling people specifically what they had done that had been helpful. She soon learned to include not only her coworkers, but also her boss. (Bosses need honest positive feedback just like anyone else.) What had been for her a weakness in management style eventually evolved into an area of professional strength.

It doesn’t matter whether it’s learning to give more one-on-one positive feedback, learning to handle change more effectively, learning to build more productive work relationships with others or learning to deliver quality to the customer. What is important is to implement your plan immediately—start small, and expand the use of your new skills. Above all, START!

Be willing to break old habits. Next time you put on a coat, start with the arm you always put in last. It’s awkward. Learning a new or different behavior is always a little uncomfortable. But be-

ing uncomfortable at first is no reason not to do something new, especially if it can pay off for you on the job.

Some people think they shouldn't do or say anything that doesn't come naturally to them. They think they have to "feel" a certain way before they can act in a certain way. Yet when we learn to act differently, in a better way, we eventually feel comfortable with that new approach.

Most of us as kids were a little afraid to ride a two-wheeled bike for the first time. But if we had waited until that feeling changed before we tried, we would still be waiting for our first ride! Fortunately, most kids are motivated to learn to ride a bike despite the fear, and most of us soon mastered the skills of riding. Our feelings of fear were replaced with feelings of confidence. Having our feelings change as a result of a change in our behavior is a normal process in human learning activities.

Bernard Baruch was a remarkably successful businessman and an advisor to a string of U.S. presidents. He once remarked, "My main habit is breaking habits." For most of us, breaking old habits is hard. But today, the success of most people in organizations demands it. And those old habits often need to be replaced with new skills.

Stick to it. Skill development does not happen overnight; it is the sum of a lot of little advances along the way. Sometimes there are setbacks and failures. Keep the process rolling; don't let things sidetrack you.

Keep your objectives clearly in focus. Learn from each successful and unsuccessful attempt, and modify your approach to include more of what works. Practice at every opportunity. Improvements will begin to build until using your new skills becomes automatic for you.

Follow up. Don't slam the door on learning when you finish the training program. Follow up in the weeks and months ahead. Use the facilitators, if they are available to you. If you need help using new skills, ask for their assistance. See them face to face, if possible, or arrange for phone discussions.

Use your fellow participants. Get together over breakfast or lunch, or over the phone, to discuss how you are doing. Get their ideas and support.

Jot down a future date in your calendar to sit back for a few minutes to ask yourself some tough questions. For example:

How have I done with my training implementation plan?

Am I better today at _____ than I was six months ago? How do I know that?

What specifically have I done that is different?

What more could I do?

What's my plan for getting those additional things done?

We too rarely go back to re-read a good book. Yet it's the second and third time through that often allows us to get the full message.

We urge you to go back and re-read your training materials and notes after some time has gone by. Maximize the return on your training investment. Look for new insights as you revisit the materials. Keep bringing the training back into your day-to-day life.

Give yourself credit where credit is due. Give yourself credit for every bit of progress, big or small, along the way. It is the accumulation of those successes that makes the real difference in the long run.

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