



## WHY SO MUCH TRAINING DOESN'T WORK!

**Avoid the pitfalls of just 'going through the motions' with training & development.** *Demonstrate a better financial return, and sleep soundly at night knowing that you have instigated a great experience that will add huge value to your employees and the organisation alike.*

"The latest survey results are in! Err, OK, **we've been marked down on 'training & development opportunities...so we should probably do some 'training' then yeah?"**

So now in this case **you'd hope that** the company will conduct some credible competency analysis of the intended delegates right? Or at least establish that the company's financial underperformance has been identified in part down to skills gaps within elements of the workforce yes? Err...no, none of these actually...pushing the training button might well still be driven by just 'box ticking', 'lip service', CPD points or unbelievably in these tough economic times, even the 'spend it or lose it' approach to budgetary management.

After many years of working on the front line in training and development with businesses large and small across numerous market sectors, the amount of pointless training & wasted time and money **being 'invested'** never ceases to amaze me.

So many organisations insist on spending their money on training when they have so little idea about what the real problem is, what the right solution is, or even how the training they're buying will help. Free thinking and innovation seems to go out of the window when the training conversation comes up, **stuck in the way it's always been**, leaving many UK organisations demonstrating all the flexibility of a **'double door' wardrobe**.

I have seen many times the functional email sent from the HR department to the delegates; I have seen the faces of the delegates entering the room looking so disenchanted, and I've heard the excuses of the 'no shows' who are in their view more than justified in their desire to want to do something else that day.

So just ask yourself, **what's the level of buy in, commitment, motivation and connection with training in your organisation?** How much do the delegates feel **that it's really designed for them?**

**The key to training being highly effective starts with the 'before' and our saying 'you can't change what you don't acknowledge'** says it all.

So how is it that in so many UK organisations (and even some pretty successful ones) that there is still so much narrow, unimaginative and disconnected thinking when it comes to people development? It's sometimes hard to know whether its cause or effect, but here's the reality.....most training doesn't work!



If we're talking technical, merely knowledge transfer stuff then this has arguably a better success rate, but if we're talking developing behavioural competence in people, improving behaviour & skill, changing & forming new habits in adults, then I'll reiterate, most training doesn't work.

Maybe it's because so much training is 'done averagely' that it doesn't work; or maybe it's done averagely *because* it doesn't work, so what's the point in investing more time and resource in doing it better?

And when I say '*doesn't work*', what does that mean? Well, in short, improved behaviour and skill demonstrated back in the workplace, a new default setting in each delegate, sustainable over time. If the organisation investing in the training has got it right, then the improved behaviour and skill will deliver the performance improvements required, along with a return on the investment that all involved would be duly proud of.

Furthermore, how about '*done averagely?*' What does that look like? Well, that's a whole chapter in itself but suffice it to say one could pick from any number of 'howlers' that I see all too often. How about not ensuring sufficient clarity and robustness of why the training is being done in the first place, or omitting to set any kind of measurement criteria. What about partnering with a supplier that does nothing to assist in building real commitment amongst the delegates, or ensuring that the actual learning interventions are tailored, relevant and inspiring to them?

By way of example, **let's** say you want to run a course for people managers to be, well, better at 'managing people'. This is a complex area, as there are many components of being a great (or a poor) people manager.

So **let's** take just one aspect of being a people manager that we work regularly with, that of giving team members high quality feedback. This includes both positive and corrective, improvement based feedback, and whilst the latter is clearly harder for most of us, we **shouldn't** assume that the former is easy, and that there is enough of it out there in the workplace, because there simply isn't.

So if we are running a one day course for people managers on let's say 'giving (better) feedback', which could also be badged 'how to have difficult conversations', ask yourself how effective a traditional course is likely to be. A day with one trainer doing lots of presenting and talking, loads of slides showing models and theory, a few delegate discussions, and each delegate making some commitments to what they will do at the end.

So **let's** start with the 'before'.....with most 'training courses', there is little or no assessment or 'gap analysis' prior to the course, so **it's** essentially a 'sheep dip.' As we have already stated, this is the first issue, as **it's** highly unlikely that the delegates are walking through the door in any way committed and clear on why they are there, and what success looks like, let alone raring to go.



Now **let's** move on to the actual training itself....even if the delegates are committed, asking people to improve and do something that they find inherently difficult, challenging, or even scary, is never going to be improved to any degree if people are merely told how to do it (in a text book kind of way).

Even if they are allowed to discuss how to do it, this has limited impact....being shown how to do it has some impact, but what they really need is the magic ingredient, that of being able to PRACTISE it in a no consequence, low risk environment and work on it, and get feedback on it. Delegates need to be able to personalise it, to try new approaches and experiment, in a way that they are highly unlikely to do in a real 'live' situation.

So one of the relevant quotes we use about this very thing is captured by the rower Ben Hunt-Davis, a gold medal winner at the Sydney Olympics, and in his book, 'Will it Make the Boat Go Faster?' he said...

*“Coming from the sporting world into the corporate world I found it amazing that people don't seem to practise. People just go and do the real thing straight off. In the boat we spent 99.9% of our time practising in a safe environment. Clearly you can't do that percentage in the business world, but if you spent say 5% of your time practising, wouldn't that increase your payback more than 5%?”*

Ben Hunt-Davis

So in short, practise that feels real is absolutely critical, as is the feedback to boost awareness of behaviour and to help the person improve, something that is sadly missing from most behavioural training in the UK.

And finally, possibly the biggest culprit of the lacklustre reputation of so much training, (and you can easily apply this to the people manager course example we are using above) is all **about the 'after', and the 'application'** of what was apparently learned on the 'training course' simply never happened.

There are a whole host of reasons for this, lack of desire or ability in the delegates, a lack of opportunity or support within the organisation, or just that no one more senior ever mentioned the training or measured its outcomes ever again, supporting the notion that *“what gets measured gets done”*.

But you can see I'm sure, that if the commitment 'before' was questionable or very low, and the training itself gave no opportunity to really own it, to experiment, and to practise, get feedback and practise again, and directly improve confidence and capability, you can see clearly why the application is almost never going to happen.



The truth is, UK businesses, their internal L&D departments, and the external training providers they work with could do just so much more to build commitment, provide inspiring development experiences and ensure far greater application of the learnings.

The reality is that *training CAN work*. Just a few important changes to the before, the during and the after can transform the outcomes, ensuring training becomes less of a **'reluctant cost'** and much more of a **'positive and willing investment'**.

The contents of this article are wholly owned by PDW Group (UK) Ltd

© PDW Group (UK) Ltd. E&OE

[www.pdwgroup.co.uk](http://www.pdwgroup.co.uk)