

5 Universal Training Blunders— And How to Avoid Them

By Nanette Miner, EdD



1

Who Am I? And What Am I Doing Here?

Too often, participants in a training session come to the session woefully unprepared to participate and gain benefit. I once conducted a training session in which I overheard a participant telling another that he had been called at home at 6:30 that morning and told by his boss to show up at my training session at 8:30. Not only did he not know what the topic of the training session was, but he held me responsible for screwing up his day - and I don't blame him. When any type of training is rolled out to the workforce, adequate communication needs to be carried out that talks about the topic and the importance of that topic to both the individual and the company as a whole. Most importantly, the expectations for new or changed behaviors should be clearly stated so that the attendees don't view the training session as a vacation-day away from their regular job.

2

What's In It For Me?

Many training participants can't make the connection between the topic and its application and usefulness to them. Several years ago during a course I was observing on finance for non-financial managers, the audience would glaze-over during the discussion on bond ratings and price-to-earnings ratios. The training was intended to impress upon the employees that their organization was not fiscally healthy and they needed to assist as much as possible in changing the situation so that the company could be sold. When it was brought to the participants attention that knowledge about bond-ratings and PE ratios were beneficial when researching stocks to invest in, they became much more engrossed in the topic.

3

I'll Never Use This Stuff!

Remember sitting in geography or calculus thinking, "When will I ever use this?" Most trainees have that same reaction. A training environment is safe and structured so as to purposely ensure a trainee's success so that they don't become discouraged during the training process. But many times the trainee can't make the leap between

classroom knowledge and real world application. This can be overcome with a simple open-ended question such as, “How do you think you might be able to use this on the job?”

4

We Don't Test in Training

Have you been to a doctor recently? Were you confident in his/her ability? Why? Probably because you know s/he had successfully completed some type of exam which certified that s/he could do the job, right?

In training, we typically send both the successful and the unsuccessful on to the next phase of the process - the next course in the series or back to the job, ostensibly to put their new skills into practice.

Most times we give them a certificate of attendance which in no way equates to a certificate of achievement - a fact lost on most attendees *and management as well.*

5

What's in it For the Company?

Would your company spend \$400,000 on advertising without measuring whether it was worth it? Of course not. Would it invest 1 million in new machinery and not expect it to pay back within a certain period of time? Doubtful. Yet, when it comes to training, too often we assume that because the trainees liked the training, they actually understood it and are going to use it to your company's benefit. A Return on Investment initiative doesn't have to be costly and time consuming. It can be as simple as testing for knowledge prior to attending the training, and then testing again after the training. If the skills that are taught are “soft skills” such as communication skills or teambuilding, it would be more helpful to use pre- and post-observations rather than tests. Another idea, and probably the simplest, is to ask trainees before they leave the training, “What's the one thing you've learned today that you will take back to the job and start using tomorrow?” Then, in 21-30 days, check back with the trainee to see if s/he is actually putting that idea to use. If not, why not? How can the training be changed so that in the future, the ideas are actually implemented back on the job?

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