

Negotiation Training:

Getting Your Money's Worth

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Introduction

Industry spends extraordinary amounts of money sending employees to training programs with the hope that the sessions will address some specific performance deficiency or generally serve to improve their performance. Therefore, the issue of how well people apply what they learn in training when they return to their jobs is critical. Investments-and training is an investment-are not made without the expectation of some improvement in productivity.

Most employees go to training programs with the best of intentions, hoping to learn new skills to enhance job performance, therefore becoming more effective at their jobs or advancing their careers. However, training frequently does not meet these objectives because in most cases, the workplace does not support employee efforts. This is an issue that consultants and training professionals must face daily and, for most of us, it is our greatest source of frustration.

I am continually amazed at how infrequently individual managers support training. Even when they send an entire department to a workshop, managers often behave as though their responsibilities begin and end with approving the budget and saying a few nice words to open the program. The responsibility for the employees' success seems to reside solely with the consultant or training professional; a certain a recipe for failure.

In a recent issue of the newsletter, Negotiation, Max Bazerman (Isidore Strauss, Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School), talked about what is required to ensure both that training works and that employees apply what they learn in the workplace. The article discusses Francine Wong and what happened to her after she returned from a 'top notch negotiation training program' with a variety of new ideas. To quote the saga of Francine, which is all too real, "back at the office, however, hundreds of

emails and voice mails awaited. She reverted to past practices and bad habits. Old negotiation patterns dominated; the new ideas were never refrozen or institutionalized." Francine Wong is not unique. All of us have talked to program participants who complain of these very same issues. The problem facing employees is how to successfully use what they have learned in training on the job. They want to succeed and do better and their bosses want the same. Unfortunately, neither fully appreciates the importance of the manager's support to the employee's ability to transfer what they learned at the program in the workplace.

My own experience suggests that the program's quality, while important, is not nearly as critical as what happens to employees in the work environment, both prior to leaving for the program and upon their return. If management does not support employees' efforts to apply what they have learned, little (if anything) will change. The problem facing all of us is how to create an environment that ensures people can apply the skills learned in training on the job.

However, we also have seen managers who play a truly active and involved role in supporting training. This attitude makes a real difference and is the only way the Francine Wong's of the world and her co-workers will ever be able to consistently and predictably apply their training in the workplace. Successful managers understand that if training is to bring about a change, it must be seen as but one aspect of improving employee performance. By it-self, training is just another activity that allows participants and their bosses to say they have met some personal or organizational objective. Training is not an end in and of itself and, by itself, rarely has a significant impact. Good managers understand this. To provide a return on the investment, management must reinforce what was learned, playing an active role in the process. Training can enhance individual performance, as well as departmental and organizational effectiveness.

The manager, by applying the following tips, can help ensure the success of training.

Prior to the Workshop

Individual

If only one or two people from your department are attending the program, meet with each and let him or her know:

- the training's importance and relevance to performance objectives you and the employee have discussed
- you want to meet with the employee as soon after the program as possible to discuss and reinforce what he/she has learned (the longer the time lapse, the more the employee forgets)
- if you have attended the program, share your experiences and what you learned there

- your expectation is that he or she will attend the complete program, not arriving late or leaving early
- if the program is on company premises, that you do not expect him or her to return to the office during lunch or breaks, and that you will not interrupt the program unless there is a unique emergency
- not to take computers, cell phones or other electronic communication devices to the workshop; these should only be used during breaks or lunch, not during the workshop

The message you should communicate to employees is that the workshop is important to their professional development and they should give it their full attention-otherwise you would not be sending them.

Organizational

If you are bringing a program in-house for the entire department, it is important that you meet with all employees to address:

- How the training will contribute to departmental effectiveness and the steps you will take after the workshop to support the training; the goal is to reinforce the reason for the training.
- What you hope they will learn from the program; relate this to your employees' jobs and the department's overall goals and objectives. This should be expressed in observable and measurable behaviors.
- Even if you attended the program previously, you should join your employees and attend a second time. Doing so sends an important message about how seriously you view the training. In addition, it will enable you to help people apply what they learn during the workshop. One manager with whom we have worked has attended our program on three separate occasions, not because he felt the need to attend, but because he was sending his entire department and felt his attendance conveyed an important message. Frequently, people attend our programs after having met with their managers and they come to the classroom with a very different perspective. They come ready to learn and take more responsibility for that learning. They are focused on what they want to get from the program and do not view training as something they are required to do; they are more actively involved.

After the Training

To insure that individual and organizational objectives are achieved, you need to follow-up the steps outlined prior to the workshop within one or two days of the session. The longer you wait, the less impact the training will have on individual participants and the organization. Every effort should be made to make this a face-to-face meeting.

When you meet with the participants, review the following:

Individual

- What did they learn during the program?
- How can they apply it to their work?
- How can you assist them?
- How would they assess the program and is it one that others should attend?

This should not be a casual conversation in the hallway or the cafeteria. The issue is important and should be treated as such. If several people went to the program, consider having them make brief presentations to the rest of the department at an upcoming staff meeting.

Organizational

- As people prepare for upcoming negotiations, spend time helping them review their information. Where appropriate, have them present their plans to a group of co-workers or to management for approval and discussion.
- After the negotiation is completed, meet to discuss whether their objectives were achieved-what worked, what could have been improved, what they learned and what they will do differently next time.
- If someone has been involved in a particularly interesting negotiation that relates to the training, ask that person to discuss it at a staff meeting.
- Have the group develop metrics to measure its effectiveness in implementing what was learned at the workshop.
- Approximately six months after the workshop, meet with individuals or the group to discuss how the training has impacted performance, as well as what the group learned.

Implications

There are three reasons to follow these steps, all focusing on the importance of return on investment. The ultimate goal is to ensure that the training was effective and made a difference for participants. Specifically you want to ensure that:

1. participants apply what they learned in training on the job
2. the department's overall performance objectives have been achieved
3. clients get their money's worth from training

The true test of any workshop is how well participants are able to apply the training to their job situations- did the program provide value? Are they negotiating better than they did prior to the program? Following these steps can ensure the workshop's success and that both the client's and the consultant's objectives are achieved.

Closing

Those of us who conduct workshops need to appreciate that our responsibility goes beyond planning and delivering first-rate training. We also need to educate managers about their responsibilities in ensuring that employees can apply what they have learned. Once managers fully appreciate their responsibilities and actively follow through on them, everyone will be more satisfied with the training results. They will see a true economic return on that investment

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