

MANAGEMENT TRAINING: WHY DOES MOST TRAINING NOT WORK?

*"Never try to teach a pig to sing.
It wastes your time and it irritates the pig."*

WHY DOES MOST TRAINING FAIL?

#1 Reason: NO GUTS, NO REINFORCEMENT & NO FOLLOW UP

In the previous chapter, we discussed the great and dire need for management training and development in this country ... a role custom made for human resources. However, the first thing to decide is whether or not the managers and the organization have the guts to put the proper management techniques to use. If not, then there is no sense in developing and training anyone.

It is like buying a membership to a gym. Just buying the gym membership does not do you any good. Driving by the gym does not help either. You actually have to go in and *use* the gym's equipment every so often. The same is true with training. (I have tried the "drive by the gym" method. Really ... it doesn't work.)

The vast majority of training programs *do not* fail because the attendees did not know what to do with the information they just learned in class. In fact, most attendees understand the concepts of the training just fine after the session ends.

Instead, far too many training programs fail because no one had the foresight to establish an effective follow up program for the attendees after the session was over. How will the managers practice these new found skills? How will this training be reinforced?

Equally detrimental to any training program is the fact that most organizations simply do not have the guts to enforce these new principles and require their employees to apply what was learned in the session. Unfortunately, too many organizations think that sending people to a training class is all they have to do to make the training work. That is just not the case, which is why the vast majority of skill building training in this country fails. (i.e. Coaching, Conducting Performance Appraisals, Documenting Employee Performance, Conflict Resolution, etc.)

Training is not a "magic pill" you have your people swallow and "WHAM!" ... all of your problems are solved. Unfortunately, too many of us today think that is exactly how we can get what we want. We are looking for that quick fix without much effort.

“I don’t really want to workout and watch my diet to lose weight, so I take this pill I bought from an “Infomercial” on TV. Hey, they guy the TV has a washboard stomach and he hasn’t worked out a day in his life. He just took this pill ... and it worked great! He looked very happy next to that model with the legs up to her neck!”

Such an approach is just not realistic.

In order to secure the transference of the material learned in class to the workplace, management must enforce these new learning points, which should become part of its culture.

In short, employees should not be given a choice as to whether they are going to use what they have just learned in class to their daily jobs. Otherwise, why hold the training class at all?

Human behavior is very predictable in many instances. When we experience change, such as a new way of doing things at work, people resist. We are creatures of habit, which explains why we drive into work each day and often cannot remember how we got there. In reality, most of us arrive at work every day by sheer force of habit.

Attendees are usually unfamiliar and uncomfortable with the new principles they have just learned ... or they are afraid of not being able to use these new skills properly.

Others resist because they are just more comfortable with doing things the “old way,” even if the old way does not work. As a result, people quickly revert to their old ways like running back to a comfortable “safety blanket.” We refer to this phenomenon as **“Running Back to Linus’ Blanket.”**

However, if an organization decides that it really is serious about effectively managing its employee relations, the largest part of its budget, then ... and *only* then should the organization consider training its people. If that is the case, then managers will need help implementing the principles they just learned in class. One way to ensure that there will be a successful transference of principles learned in class to the workplace is for the human resource people to follow up with the attendees and mentor them. Again, training employees is not just a one shot deal. Employees need to understand how the organization wants them to handle certain situations, which is the organization’s culture. Managers need training to teach them the fundamentals of management, but they also need a coach or a mentor to advise them in how to apply these new principles across the next several weeks and months.

In other words:

TRAINING SESSIONS IMPART EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE.

After the session is over, organizations need to focus on forming new **HABITS** with their people.

and again, and again, and again, until the skill becomes second nature.

So, what are people really doing when they form a new habit?

They are re-wiring their brains ... literally.

Think of it this way: If you set your alarm clock at 4:30 am every morning, getting up at that hour will be very difficult at first. However, after about 30 to 60 days of consistently getting up at 4:30 am, you will then begin to wake up at that time on your own without having to wait for the alarm clock to go off. Why? Because you have formed a “habit.” Your brain will “automatically” start waking you up at that hour. It will become “automatic.”

We see this same phenomenon occur when we drive to work everyday. On most days, most of us have no idea at all how we got there. We just unconsciously do it. This is because we have driven this route so many times that we have actually “rewired” our brains to unconsciously and automatically follow this route to work everyday. In other words, we have “fired” our neurological cells so many times in a new manner that we have actually rewired these structures. This is what we commonly refer to as a habit.

One big reason most training fails is because the attendees do not follow up and form these habits after the session ends. Practicing these skills is the key ... just as in learning any new skill.

In order to help ensure that the attendees are using these skills they have just learned in class, they need to have support from the organization to assist them in this application of these skills again, and again, and again ... well, you get the idea.

So, how are these habits formed? How do we help ensure that attendees do in fact practice what they have learned?

Practice Training Sessions

One of the most effective ways to begin forming these habits is to conduct the regular training session to educate the attendees, then schedule training practice sessions in which the attendees come to training to do nothing but practice what they have learned. In these practice sessions, the attendees do nothing but drill and drill and drill with each other what they have learned. Such repetition can go along way in not only building a familiarity with all of the attendees and the new skill, but it can also be a great help in forming the overall habit the organization is trying to achieve.

These “Practice Sessions” can be repeated until the new skill becomes habit, which might mean holding these sessions once every couple of weeks or once a month.

Practice Luncheon Sessions

I also often advise my clients to plan on holding luncheon sessions where attendees can continue to practice what they learned in class. Very informal luncheon sessions where you throw a few pizzas or other lunch favorites on the table for everyone can be a great team builder and practice session. Attendees can then use their real-life situations as exercises, then role play and practice resolving the issue. Again, this is the purpose of role playing in class. We do not conduct role playing exercises in class to build habits. We conduct these exercises in order to give attendees the framework in which to build these habits later. Such luncheon group settings in which attendees get together every week or two weeks and practice these habits is essential to reinforcing the training and building these habits.

Assign Partners For Practicing These Skills

Attendees can also be given “partners” or a “buddy.” (I prefer the term “partner” since “buddy” sounds a little too “field trippy.”) These partners are expected to practice these skills with each other before going into real life situations, such as giving a warning to an employee, coaching an employee, etc. I will never understand why managers insist on going into these sessions “cold” without any rehearsal ... and then wonder why the session did not go well. Practice, practice, practice! Use your partner as someone that helps you prepare. Managers must role play the scenario before going into the situation for real. This role playing not only works out some of the unforeseen problems, but it builds the person’s confidence.

Individual Coaching

Another way to reinforce this new skill is to set aside time to coach the attendees as they try to apply these skills in their jobs, which should also include role playing the actual scenarios the person is addressing. Outside consultants can be used for this initial coaching, but specific internal “point people” should also be trained and coached in how to work with the employees who went to the training. This on-going coaching or mentoring role is perfect for human resource people.

Outside consultants should be used to coach your internal people when the organization is nearing “crisis mode” and must get its people up to speed in a hurry. Bringing in a team of consultants to coach your people will build these habits very quickly, but it is also expensive.

If the organization has the time to devote to forming these habits, then the trainer or consultant should work with the on-site human resource people, or whoever has been chosen to be the on-site mentor, and develop their skills. The consultant can also be used to deal with some of the more difficult situations.

Although outside consultants can be very useful in helping an organization “get on its feet” and assist in this initial transference from the classroom to the workplace, the

ultimate goal is to make the organization as self-sufficient as possible. This means developing your own internal coaches and mentors.

THIS IS WHERE HUMAN RESOURCES SHINES!

Not all human resource people are good trainers. Even if they are, **very** few HR people have the time to write and design an entire management training course. That is why there are so many management trainers in the world today. This is also why the outside trainer needs the internal human resource person ... and vice versa.

- ❖ The proper people must be chosen to go to training,
- ❖ The outside trainer designs the program for the organization and presents it ... then
- ❖ The internal human resource person takes this information and mentors the managers in how to properly apply this training over the next several weeks and months.

EMPLOYEES WITH POTENTIAL GO TO TRAINING

+

TRAINER'S SESSION

+

PRACTICE & INTERNAL MENTORING (FORMING HABITS)

HIGH LEVEL OF RETENTION AND APPLICATION

All three parts of this equation must be present for the training to work. If one is missing, you might as well just forget the whole thing.

Unfortunately, some of these attendees will simply refuse to comply. Organizations that undergo these training programs need to give serious thought to what repercussions these attendees will suffer if they are not able to, or more than likely, unwilling to apply and use these skills. My recommendation is to always give everyone a chance to go through the training and a chance to improve. However, when employees adopt such attitudes as, "You can't make me do this," or "I don't have to do this," my response is always the same: **"You're right. I can't make you do this. Of course, I don't have to pay you anymore."**

Adopting and using the skills taught in a training session should not be optional. Otherwise, why do the training in the first place?

WHY DOES MOST TRAINING FAIL?

#2 Reason: TRAINING DOES NOT CURE “STUPID” OR GIVE “PERSONALITY-ECTOMIES”

It never ceases to amaze me who organizations actually send to training. If I do a session on “Dealing With Difficult People,” most organizations will send the difficult people. If I do session on “Leadership and Motivation,” I usually get several unmotivated managers who could get lost in the shower. Sending these people to training is a tremendous waste of resources.

This is like Jeff Gordon having two cars to choose from for Sunday’s race. One is his regular stock car, and the other is a 1956 Chevy without any tires, no engine and a family of cats living in the back seat. Jeff looks at them both, then points to the old 1956 Chevy and says, “Get the cats out of there and get it ready!”

Only an idiot would do that.

So, why do companies continually send their lowest performing managers to training, spend countless hours mentoring them and then completely ignore their managers who actually have potential? Training and on the job mentoring together can make managers more confident, they can give them specific “tools” to use in their daily lives, such as “Coaching Models” and “Communication Strategies” to follow, and they can help managers oversee the organization’s labor in a much more effective manner. However, training and mentoring cannot fix everything.

First, training **cannot** give someone a “personality-ectomy.” You can build and improve manager’s skills with training and mentoring, but you cannot change their personalities...and you really don’t have the time to try. If a manager has a lousy personality, training is not the answer. Another position, either inside or outside the company, is what needs to happen in those situations.

It is amazing to me how many times I will hear from employers:

We have some managers who need to work on improving their PERSONALITIES.

Every time I hear this question, the same response goes through my head:

“Oh, no.”

This idea that we can somehow “magically” transform someone’s personality from that of a knuckle-dragging Neanderthal into “Prince Charming” is absurd...and it is **very** insulting to the manager who has just been told that his personality “stinks.” (Nothing personal, though.)

Look ... training gives people **EDUCATION** and **KNOWLEDGE**. This newly discovered information is then applied and used to build the attendees’ **SKILLS**.

That is it! Period.

Training is not designed to “raise the dead” or to give people “personality implants.” If you attempt such feats, your training efforts will be 99% unsuccessful, which will most likely kill the rest of your training efforts that might have otherwise been successful.

You can put all the effort in the world into changing water into wine, but for the vast majority of people ... it is not going to happen **regardless** of how long you work with the water or how hard you try. In the end, it will still be water.

It also amazes me how companies are so “shocked” and “surprised” that the managers they send to training are so “offended.” I can’t understand why they would be offended. We just told them that their personalities were flawed and they needed to work on that. Maybe while we are at it, we will also have them work on changing their eye color.

Still, thousands of times everyday in America, companies do just that. They tell their managers they have lousy personalities and that they need to “fix” that. Of course, the company is being very gracious and helpful because they are willing to send the person to training to “help” them with their “personality disorders.” Organizations then cannot understand why the defective manager isn’t more cooperative. “We were only trying to help you ... you moron!” (Note the heavy sarcasm here.)

These organizations then spend thousands of dollars trying to help these managers to improve. They even bring in a “professional” trainer who “chants” and “hums” with the irritating managers. What more is a company expected to do?

Eventually, the manager fails to improve. Actually, in many instances, the manager’s personality becomes even **more** rancid. Then, one of a few different things usually happens.

First, we might **promote** the manager into a position where he no longer supervises people. (I didn’t say this was a **good** idea ... I am just saying this happens.)

Second, we often ignore the problem by saying, “Hey, we did all we could. It looks like we are just going to have to live with it. Boy, but I sure am glad I don’t work for that manager.”

Or thirdly, the company might discipline these managers for irritating other people ... and then eventually terminate the manager because he wouldn’t change his personality. Still, the company does not feel any guilt or responsibility over the manager’s failure because “we did everything we could.”

Such efforts are **misguided** at best. More often than not, they are self-fulfilling prophecies.

Managers **cannot** be given new personalities. However, they can be educated and have their skills improved. There is a huge difference between trying to change someone’s personality and working with them to improve their skills.

In those situations when I get a call from a potential client who wants to change someone’s personality, I describe to them the difference between “skill building” and a “personality-ectomy.” Usually, the problem lies with the person’s communication skills.

For example, in developing the person’s communication skills, we need to look to see what the person is actually doing wrong. In order to be a good communicator, we would need to see what style of communication the person is using. Is the manager a “Retreater,” which means he does not address issues, but instead tends to ignore them until they explode one day? Or is the manager an “Attacker,” which is one of those “I tell it like it is people,” who then tends to deliver a truthful message ... but in a very arrogant manner which does nothing but “tick off” the receiver?

What we want managers to do is communicate using an **HONEST REPECTFUL STYLE OF COMMUNICATION**. We can instruct the manager in each of these three “Styles of Communication,” and then educate the manager as to why the only style that really works is the latter one. Next, we can work with the manager so he will have a chance to practice the skill of Honest Respectful Communication until it becomes second nature.

Understand what is happening here:

We Are NOT Changing His PERSONALITY!

We ARE Building The Manager’s Communication Skills By Teaching Him How To Communicate In An Honest Respectful Manner.

We would then want to look at the “building blocks” of good communication, which include:

- ❖ Does The Manager Establish “**COMMON GOALS**” With His People...Or Are Their Goals at Odds With Each Other? Are There “Ulterior” Agendas At Work Here?
- ❖ Has The Manager Built A “**TRUSTFUL RELATIONSHIP**” With His Employees? (Commonly referred to as the basis for “Teambuilding.”) Has The Manager Done The Following With The Employees?
 - **Built Familiarity (Get To Know What Makes Them “Tick”?)**
 - **Built Understanding (Learning The Employees’ VALUES)**
 - **Encouraged Self-Expression (Hearing Their Employees’ Opinions)**
 - **Established An Honest and Trustful Relationship (Had the Manager Disagreed With His Employees...And Showed Them That Disagreeing With The Supervisor is OK?)**
- ❖ Established A “**COMMON UNDERSTANDING**” With Employees? (Do You **FIRST** Seek To Understand The Other Person...And **THEN** Seek To Be Understood ... as Stephen Covey teaches?) This is also referred to as “**EMPATHIC LISTENING.**”

Training can take marginal managers and make them good managers. It can take good managers and make them “superior” managers. But training cannot take lousy managers and make them good.

Why? There is nothing there to work with in the case of terrible managers. There has to be a basic aptitude there in the first place. Such managers should simply not be in management at all. Still, the bottom 5% of the employees continue to receive over half of the training provided by the company ... with little or no results.

Human resource and training and development people are not Gods. They cannot turn a lousy manager into a good one. If there is nothing there to work with, they are wasting their time...at the expense of the good employees and the organization’s productivity. The more time you spend with your worst employees, the less time you have to develop your good employees...and you will **NOT** get a return on your investment in time and training from your lowest performers. There just simply is not a “Return on Investment,” or “ROI,” in these situations.

In a study conducted by Dr. John Sullivan from the University of San Francisco, Dr. Sullivan theorized that training and working with low performers was a total waste of time. In Dr. Sullivan’s study, he went back two years and identified 1019 people in a large retail organization that had received average ratings of a “2” on their last two performance

reviews. Receiving an overall score of a “2” on this organization’s review meant the person “needed improvement” on a rating scale of “1” to “5” with the “5” being the highest score possible.

The company then calculated the money spent on trying to improve these employees’ performance, which included expenses relating to training, coaching, management time, etc. In this intense program, the average cost per employee equated to **\$13,090** per person. With 1019 employees going through this training and mentoring program, the total dollar cost to the company came to **\$13,338,710**.

After these employees were given this additional training and mentoring, Dr. Sullivan looked to see how many of these 1019 “low performing” employees had improved to the point of becoming a “top performer,” which meant these employees received reviews that were in the top 20% of the company. After such intense training and mentoring, and after spending more than 13 million dollars and working with these people for months ...

NOT ONE EMPLOYEE ROSE TO THE LEVEL OF A TOP PERFORMER ... EVEN AFTER RECEIVING INTENSE TRAINING AND MENTORING.

Why? Because you should ...

**Never try to teach a pig to sing...
It wastes your time and it irritates the pig.**

Training and mentoring should be directed at those employees who really do have the best chance of improving. When an organization sends a manager to training, it should be viewed as a privilege, and organizations should treat it that way. If organizations really sent their best people to training and mentored these people properly, they would receive a tremendous return on that investment. That should be the bottom-line objective whenever an organization spends money and devotes resources to anything:
WHAT IS THE ROI?

While we would like to think everyone can be trained and molded into a good employee, that is just not the case ... and deep down, everyone knows it. Therefore, not only should the right training and mentoring be given to employees...but the right employees should be chosen to receive it.

WHY DOES MOST TRAINING FAIL?

#3 Reason: LOUSY TRAINERS

It never ceases to amaze me—being an employment attorney **and** a human resource person, how many times companies pay thousands of dollars to trainers, and in most cases, God help them, an attorney, to come in and conduct training sessions that proceed to do nothing but bore the living daylights out of everyone! Needless to say, it does not work.

More people remember what Bill Cosby says than the President of the United States ... and I would certainly hope (which might not be true) what the President is saying is more important to all of us than what Bill Cosby is saying. (Yes...I agree...that point is highly debatable.)

Still, companies continue to pay thousands and thousands of dollars each year (billions, actually) to trainers who are admittedly experts in their fields, such as attorneys, to come in and educate their people. However, it is difficult to learn anything when you are falling asleep and drooling on yourself from boredom.

It is a lot like sitting in a classroom listening to the instructor mutter, “Bueller? Bueller?”

So, what is the solution?

I would never ... and I repeat **never** let any trainer present to my people unless the trainer could explain to me which Adult Learning Principles he/she intends to use to help ensure the attendees will understand the message and the principles being taught ... and how the attendees will better retain them.

Malcolm Knowles has researched the principles of Adult Learning Theory in detail and has drawn some definite conclusions companies should be aware of as they strive to educate their managers and employees. Knowles concluded that there are some very basic principles of adult learning that should be followed **whenever** educating adults in order to boost comprehension and retention of the material, which greatly helps in the transference of learning from the classroom to the workplace.

PRINCIPLES OF ADULT LEARNING

1. **The Greater Number of Senses Used, The Better**

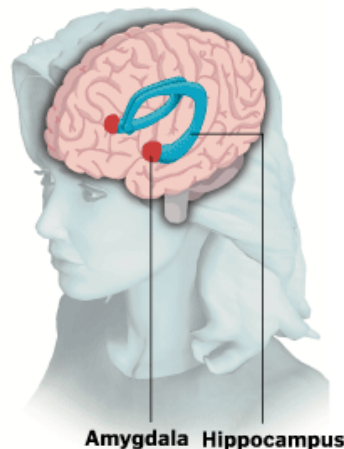
The **greater number of senses** that are used by students throughout the instruction, the greater their retention will be. In short, the more actively involved the attendees are in the training, the more they will understand and retain.

Unfortunately, whenever people are trained in anything, there must be a certain amount, if not a substantial amount, of lecture. However, this does not mean learning and retention has to drop.

One way to increase the students' retention of the material during lecture is to use **humor**. When people find the material entertaining as well as informative, retention skyrockets. Again, more people remember what Bill Cosby says than the President of the United States.

Bill Cosby's audiences are **actively involved** in his presentation because they are entertained. They laugh, which stimulates the endorphins in their bodies. As a result, their brains are energized...they are **VERY** actively listening to what he is saying and they are hanging on his every word in anticipation of what he is going to say next. As a result, people retain what Bill Cosby says for **years**. This is also why we are barely able to remember 1% of what the President says in his (or her) State of the Union Address ... even though I would hope the State of the Union address is infinitely more important to us than Mr. Cosby's childhood stories. (Obviously, I like Bill Cosby.)

Of course, it is important to understand that neuroscience backs up this theory that people learn best when their emotions, such as laughter, are involved. In order to understand humans remember information and events best, you have to first understand two very important structures that lie in the center of the brain, as can be seen in the following diagram:



The **amygdalas**, which are two almond-sized structures that sit right behind our eyes, act as the body's emotional center. In other words, they react in response to pleasant and unpleasant sights, sounds, smells, taste and touch. Laughter, joy, anger, avoidance, and defensiveness are all emotions that are

activated by the amygdala.

The **hippocampus** is located right behind the amygdalas. The hippocampus is primarily concerned with storing new information and factual-based memories. Of course, as most everyone knows, emotions and memory are *very* closely related. This is because the amygdala is located right beside and in front of and attached to the hippocampus.

When we think positive thoughts and have positive experiences, which are types of stress referred to as “eustress,” we release a nice even flow of cortisol onto our amygdalas and endorphins into our bodies that have a very positive effect on our state of mind and health. When we eat comfort food, when we exercise, when we sit in the sun and warm our bodies, when we get a massage, or when we work with positive emotionally mature people, we get into the “FLOW” of the experience due to these endorphins and the even flow of cortisol in our brains. This state of mind gives us the “high” or a “FLOW” type of experience. We are “polishing” our emotional systems with very positive and healing dose of chemicals. This is why we can spend tremendous amounts of energy and focus for extended periods of time performing tasks we enjoy or working with people we enjoy without growing too overly tired.

Since the hippocampus (new information memory) is located right behind our amygdalas, these chemicals also act to “seal in” the memory. This phenomenon is why people always remember where they were when they heard about President Kennedy’s assassination, 9-11 and so on. The event was so emotional that the cortisol seals the memory in forever.

Our mind simply is not able to remember everything that happens in our lives. It is not a video recorder that is able to just “replay” the events of our lives, such as in a training session. Instead, we remember “postcards” or “snapshots” of what we experience. In other words, we recall the more “emotionally stimulating” experiences, such as when we laugh or hear moving stories, and let the other events slip into the background.

Therefore, if trainers tie the information they are teaching to an emotion, such as laughter, an event or a story, the attendees will have a much better chance of remembering it. The attendees’ will be much better able to recall what was covered in the training session.

This is how trainers can hold their audiences’ attention for several hours. I am always amused when I hear managers tell me, “Well, you know our people only have an attention span of about an hour ... maybe an hour and a half tops.”

“So,” I respond, “None of your people have ever sat through a football game or watched a movie all the way through, since their attention span is so short. Right?”

The truth of that matter is that these employees have only been exposed to lousy trainers who are probably great subject matter experts, but they bore the heck out of their audiences to the point that they lose the employees within the first 15 minutes or so. Just because someone is a subject matter expert does not mean they are able to train other people.

Learning **MUST** be tied to emotion. Otherwise, recalling the session’s content will just not happen.

(Now you understand the hell I go through at “Continuing Legal Education” seminars. While most of the legal presenters know their subject matter better than most anyone, they can also bore the enamel off your teeth. In the end, retention drops to almost nothing.)

Interestingly, this is one major reason why the vast majority of on-line or web-based training simply does not work. It is extremely difficult to make a connection with attendees when they are staring at a computer screen trying to learn something. The ability to interact is greatly reduced, it is more difficult to address specific questions and the emotional connection that seals in memory so attendees can recall the lesson at a later time is not nearly as prevalent as it is in real-time training.

2. Adults Want To Use Their Own Prior Experiences As A Foundation Of Knowledge

There are basically two different theories that are used to distinguish between adult learners (Andragogical Learning) and child learners (Pedagogical Learning). At its most basic level, children do not have any real experiences to draw upon when they go to class to learn a new subject. To some degree, most everything is new to them. So, using their own past experiences to form analogies relating to the new material is not always possible. Therefore, many child educators use pure repetition to teach young adults and children new material. This is why my Latin teacher believed that way to your brain was through your hand. I think I got carpal tunnel due to all of the Latin verbs I conjugated over the years. (This is also one of many reasons why I hated Latin ... but I digress.)

Adult learners, however, are quite different. If you try to use repetition with adults, they will most likely revolt. Pure repetition is not necessary for adult learners ... nor is it practical. Adult learners have a huge advantage over their younger counterparts:

Their past experiences

Adult learners can actually learn much more quickly than their younger counterparts since they do not have to start from “square one.” Adult learners can build upon what they have already learned and draw analogies to the new material. This is one reason Jesus was such an effective teacher:

He used “parables”

“Parables” are short stories that everyone can relate to and understand. Parables are used to teach people new concepts by relying on stories that involve experiences common to everyone. As a result, Jesus was able to take complex topics and break them down into simple principles that apply to everyday life through the use of readily identifiable stories. Therefore, people were not **really** learning anything new. Instead, they merely took what they already knew and applied it in a different way. Consequently, understanding and retention soars.

Therefore, for every learning point in a trainer’s presentation there should be a “story” or some real-life example to go with it. Better yet, if the “story” is humorous or memorable in some way, attention and retention increases all that much more. This makes the story more “visual” for the listener.

Additionally, since adults learn much faster when they can relate the learning points being covered in class to their own experiences, it is often useful for the trainer to draw a “timeline” of when certain events occurred. For instance, I often teach managers about employment law. When I teach this material, I like to draw a timeline for them dating back to at least 1964, which was the year Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act was born. The history of most of today’s employment laws originate from this year.

Therefore, when attendees understand this timeline, retention of the various employment laws soars. They understand how these laws logically, or illogically, fit together and why they came into existence when they did. Using such a “time and space continuum” puts everything into perspective for these adult learners in a nice orderly fashion, which then relates to other events they are familiar with during these periods of time, so learning increases.

Which brings up another important point:

SUBTLE and ABSTRACT EXAMPLES DO NOT WORK!!!

People are **visual** learners. If the examples I use in class are “abstract” and not readily identifiable, the illustrations will have little impact on the attendees. However, if I use examples to illustrate the training program’s learning points that are **CONCRETE, VISUAL** and **IDENTIFIABLE**, attendees will remember the example I used as well as its corresponding learning point.

For instance, when I use examples of major management “screw ups,” I prefer to use examples of public figures, such as elected or appointed officials ... and I put their photos in my presentations. Why? Well, for one, it is almost impossible to defame a public figure, so I rest easy when I reveal their management flaws to my attendees. However, more importantly, again, people are visual learners:

A picture truly is worth a thousand words.

If I refer to some abstract example that arose with “some organization” regarding what “some politician” said “out there somewhere,” the visual aspect of the story, and thus its impact and retention value for the attendees, is greatly reduced.

Besides, public figures are always saying or doing something remarkably stupid that I can use to illustrate my learning points. For instance, where I live, Reynoldsburg, Ohio, I have personally observed some of the best examples of inept management and bullying that you could ever imagine. These instances of management ineptness have been a gift from God for my training programs. Of course, if these were not all true, no one would believe them.

For instance, Reynoldsburg’s Clerk to City Council and the President of City Council commonly make the following comments to city employees:



Nancy Frazier: Reynoldsburg Clerk of City Council

Refers to City employees as “The Hired Help” as she makes a dismissive “Marie Antoinette-style” hand wave in their faces.



William Hills: Reynoldsburg City Council President

**Commonly tells City employees AND the citizens of the community:
“We are the City Council of Reynoldsburg.
We can talk to you however we want, but you need to treat us with respect.”
Hills then proceeds to humiliate them in public.**



Whenever City employees go before Reynoldsburg City Council to make a report, they are treated in such a condescending and abusive manner that they refer to the experience of going before council as The Public Flogging.

See what I mean?

These were the examples of terrible management I referred to in Chapter 5: **“MANAGEMENT TRAINING IN AMERICA.”** If you recall in Chapter 5, I just made references to what these people said. I did not identify who they were or use any visuals.

Not very memorable, was it?

However, now you have a *face* to go with each stupid comment ... a clear, concrete *visual* (my categorization, obviously). These comments are now very real to the learner. They did not happen in some far off mythical land of “Oz.” Now ... you can see them. The example is vivid and visual. **THIS** you will remember. (Don’t worry ... They are public officials. They’re tough ... they can take it ... or at least, that was what they tell the city employees before they *beat the crap out of them* ... but I digress.)

This is also why I use the names of “cartoon characters” in the group exercises we do in class. I take the *real life situations* I have encountered or the *real life situations* the organization has experienced and I put these events into exercises we use in class. (**REMEMBER:** Real life “Rubber Hits The Road” examples are **always** best! Most adults **hate** pure theory. There must be a practical application to the theory for it to be real for the attendees.) Of course, in order to spare the feelings of the **everyday people** involved in these situations, I change their names to protect the guilty.

However, if I changed their names to “John Doe” or “Jane Doe,” the example becomes abstract...which reduces visualization...which reduces attendee’s understanding and interest, which reduces retention, which makes transference to the workplace impossible.

So, rather than making up names and characters for my exercises, I use cartoon names, such as Bugs Bunny, Mickey Mouse, Goofy, George Jetson, Mr. Dithers, and so on. **Now** ... the attendees know who I am talking about in my exercises. They can visualize the person (or cartoon character) I am referring to because they “know” the person I am discussing. Also, cartoon characters are just plain fun ... which tends to lighten the atmosphere a bit when we are discussing intense and touchy topics.

(No, there is not a copyright issue by simply referring to a character by name. There is a big copyright issue involved in using their likeness, such as a photo of the character.)

So, if using such vivid examples boosts understanding and retention of the program’s learning points, why don’t most trainers use them? Well, to be gracious, (which is not my strong suit, but I will give it a shot) most subject matter experts are simply not aware of these Adult Learning Principles. These techniques are certainly not taught in any law school curriculum. Therefore, while most experts do in fact know their subject matter very well, they are not professional trainers. It doesn’t do employees and

managers any good to attend a training session conducted by an “expert” who cannot convey the material effectively.

Of course, another reason why trainers typically do not use such real life and visual examples is because of the “**Rules of Leadership**” discussed earlier in this book:

**RULE #1:
NEVER UPSET ANYONE!**

**RULE #2:
AVOID ALL FORMS OF CONFLICT**

**RULE #3:
NEVER ADDRESS AN ISSUE. IGNORE IT...IT WILL GO AWAY.**

While using vivid and visual examples in training will increase the understanding and retention of the material by the attendees, it will also tick off your “5 Percenters.” However, watering down our management training and not addressing issues “head on,” especially in the “laboratory” setting of the classroom, is how we get 77% of all Americans hating their jobs, 20% higher heart attack rates on Monday morning, etc.

For me, if the 5 Percenters get upset ... **WHO CARES!!!** Why we keep managing our organizations to the exception and letting the tail wag the entire company is beyond me. If you are not interested in maximizing the retention level of the learning points covered in the training session ...

THEN WHY ARE YOU TRAINING YOUR PEOPLE AT ALL?

The vast majority of our people are in fact good decent people who are not hypersensitive and will enjoy the visuals. I suggest you gear your training to these **good employees** and ***not*** to the 5 Percenters. It is the good decent employees of your organizations who will take the information being conveyed and make the organization a better place ... not the 5 Percenters. (Actually, I am wondering why these 5 Percenters are even still there.)

Let’s face it: What we are doing now in our training programs **IS NOT WORKING**. How do I know that? **77% of all Americans hating their jobs...20% higher heart attack rates on Monday morning...etc.**

Additionally, it is important to understand that for every example of poor behavior used in a training session, there should also be at least one example of positive behavior to illustrate what employees or managers should be doing. Those examples should also be as real-life and as visual as possible. Of course, no one complains when they are used as an example of *good behavior*. Still, the point is that in any illustration, concrete examples should be used so attendees can readily relate to and visualize the specific learning point covered in class.

3. Adults Are Interested In Testing The New Theories Or Concepts They Have Just Learned Against What They Were Previously Taught

It is important to give attendees an opportunity to actually practice the new principle they have just learned. Therefore, trainers should use instructional techniques that allow their employees who are receiving the instruction the opportunity to apply what they have learned in the classroom setting, which might include using case studies to apply the principles in small groups, role playing, etc.

When this is done, retention skyrockets.

Application...Application...Application!!!

4. Adults Learn At Different Rates Because Of Differences In Interest, Motivation, Occupation and Education

Trainers should take into account the individual differences of the employees being instructed to help ensure that the material is being taught at an appropriate speed and at a proper level of difficulty. Targeting the speed and difficulty of the material to those employees receiving it helps to increase understanding, application, and retention of the topic.

Taking into account the individual differences of the attendees, it is very likely that the examples used to reinforce a learning point for a physician's office will not be relevant for a group of warehouse employees. The illustrations and examples used in class should be geared toward the audience. They should be able to relate to what they are being taught in a practical everyday manner. Therefore, professional trainers really need to have a multitude of different examples they can use to make sure the material they are teach relates directly to the attendees.

This is why whenever I conduct a training session for a client that I try to gather as much information as possible regarding the organization's current challenges and issues. I then use these situations and apply them directly to the material being covered in class. That is about as individualized as it gets.

5. Adults Must See The Relevance Of The Information

Trainers should make it clear to those employees receiving the instruction at the very beginning of the session **why this information is important** to their current and/or future duties. In other words, a “**need**” must be established to create a desire to learn. This “need” must be presented in a practical “rubber hits the road” manner. Again, concrete well-defined examples are the best.

ADULT LEARNING PRINCIPLES IN GENERAL

In conclusion, if I was hiring a trainer to present to my people, not only would I want to know the specific learning points to be covered in class, but I would also ask that trainer to explain to me which Adult Learning Principles he/she would be using so the attendees will retain the information more readily. If the trainer cannot answer these questions, or if the person just gives you a dumb blank stare...**RUN!** Far too many training programs fail from the very beginning **not** because the information was not relevant, but instead because the trainer never got the information and learning points into the attendees' heads in the first place.

WHY DOES MOST TRAINING FAIL?

#4 Reason: POOR PROGRAM DESIGN

Even if the trainer is a very good presenter and understands the fundamentals of how adults learn and retain information, the **design** of the training program should also be taken into consideration. Even the best trainer cannot take a poorly designed program and make it work.

The following is a list of considerations trainers should keep in mind as they design their training programs.

1. Establishing the **NEED** For The Training

In designing the training program's content, in most cases, the trainer should begin by establishing the “need” for the training. Establishing this need should not be too hard to do. If it is, then the need for the training session itself should be questioned.

However, the designer should relate this need for the training in a very practical manner right up front. The attendees should immediately see how this training session will apply directly to their jobs and how their work lives will improve if they apply the learning principles being taught. Once that part of the training is written, it is time to design the content of the program.

2. The Content Of The Instructional Material Must Be Organized In The Most Effective Manner Possible For Learning

Whoever is designing the training program's content must also bear in mind that the information covered in the session must be arranged in such a way that it is most easily understood and communicated for the attendees.

If the information being taught is simple and easy to understand, then the entire subject can be presented all at once, which is referred to as whole learning, or Gestalt learning. Otherwise, a simple topic can easily become boring and unchallenging, which diminishes interest.

Most topics, however, are more complicated. For those topics that are more difficult to understand, the information should be broken down into smaller subsets and then presented in sequential order, which is referred to as "part learning." If a difficult topic is presented all at once in its entirety, the students receiving the instruction can easily become overwhelmed by the material, which frustrates their learning.

Therefore, the learning points that are to be addressed in the program should be broken down into simple, small portions. They should then be arranged in a logical sequence, most often going from the simplest learning point to the most complicated. In other words, these learning principles "build" on each other to complete the program. This approach is often referred to as "Building" or "Diagramming" the program.

As these learning points "build on" each other throughout the program, the designer should be able to draw upon or "diagram back" each of the learning points to the previous learning points that have already been covered. Actually, if you were to list each of these learning points horizontally across a sheet of paper, the designer should be able to draw arrows back to the previous learning points and identify how these points all build on each other. How these learning points fit together should then be recapped and summarized frequently for the attendees throughout the session, which, if you remember, supports the Adult Learning Principle of providing a logical progression for the attendees, much like the order and logical sequence of a timeline.

Further, for each learning point, the designer should have an example to go with it. In following Adult Learning Principles, adults learn best when they draw upon their past experiences. In applying this principle, the Jesus “Parable” method should be used, as previously discussed. These “stories” or analogies that relate to the attendees’ personal experiences should also be included with the training program’s diagram. These relevant examples should be strategically placed throughout the session.

Do not confuse this method of “part learning” with giving the attendees an overview or a “map” of the course materials at the beginning of the session. It is a good idea in many instances to give attendees an overview of where the trainer is going in the session, but trainers should not give too much detail at this point. Too much detail at the start can be confusing and can overwhelm the attendees. This overview should be very quick and should be just enough to give the attendees a good feel for where the trainer is going to take them.

Trainers should also realize that “**distributed learning,**” which is **educational material spaced out over time**, should be used whenever possible to obtain more permanent retention of the material being taught. The value of “distributed learning” is that it allows for attendees to not only “digest” what they have learned in the session, but it gives them time to practice the various learning points between sessions. Therefore, it is usually better to space the training out over a few months rather than trying to “squeeze” everything in across a few days.

WHY DOES MOST TRAINING FAIL?

#5 Reason: BAD INFORMATION

Yes, believe it or not, there are “charlatans” out there who really do not understand the subject matter they are teaching. As a result, they present “bad information.”

“Bad information” falls under several categories:

1. **Wrong Information**

Unfortunately, believe it or not...not all experts are quite as “expert” as they profess. Sometimes, the information taught to employees is not just misleading, it is sometimes flat **wrong**.

I have had general practitioner attorney's tell my clients that it is legal to withhold employees' paychecks until they return certain equipment, that exempt salaried employees can be made to clock in and out to make sure they are working at least 50 hours a week, and so on. This information is **all wrong!**

Unfortunately, trainers who are supposed to be experts in their field are sometimes wrong in the material they teach. Beware! Check credentials and qualifications before you hire a trainer.

2. The Information Being Conveyed Does Not Fit With The Organization's Culture

Other times, the information disseminated in the training program is not necessarily wrong ... but it might not fit with the culture of the organization. Every training class the organization conducts for its employees should reinforce its culture.

For instance, some organizations will terminate employees for their off-duty conduct, such as at Scott's Miracle Grow. If you work for Scott's Lawn and decide to smoke, even on your own time, you are fired. Other organizations feel what employees do on their own time is none of their business. The difference between such companies lies in their various cultures. The information taught in class should reinforce the organization's culture ... not contradict it. Trainers should make sure what they are saying in class actually supports the organization's culture. No "mixed messages" should be sent to employees.

3. "Ivory Tower" Material: The Information Being Conveyed Is Not Realistic

"Bad Information" also falls under the category of "Ivory Tower" information. What is "Ivory Tower" information? This occurs when the trainer has *no idea* how things really work in the real world.

For instance, I had one university professor actually tell me that it should take two to three years to turn the culture of an organization around.

Two to three years? You have got to be kidding me! Could you imagine what Donald Trump would say if he wanted you to turn a company around and you replied that it should take three years?

You're fired!

Far too many profess to be experts in their field, yet have never really applied these principles in the real world. Again, organizations can avoid this problem if they simply check the backgrounds of the trainers they are looking to hire, check their references and discuss with the trainer how the employees are supposed to actually apply what is taught once the training session is over.

So...How Do You Avoid These Problems?

Once you have decided that you are really serious about defining your culture and enforcing your standards, it may be time to start training. So, even if you have the “guts” to do this, how do you avoid these other pitfalls?

If you are designing and presenting your own training programs, follow the principles discussed in this chapter.

If you are hiring an outside trainer, **ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS!**

QUESTIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS LOOKING TO TRAIN

1. What training is needed?
2. Who should go to the training?
3. What do you want your attendees to be able to do after the training is over that they cannot do now?
4. What follow up mentoring or coaching will be provided in order to form a habit from those skills learned in the training?
5. What is the organization prepared to do with those employees who refuse to adopt these skills into their jobs?

QUESTIONS FOR POTENTIAL TRAINERS

1. What are the learning points to be covered?
2. Which Adult Learning Principles does the trainer intend to use to increase understanding and retention?
3. How will the program be designed?
4. What training methods will the trainer use during the training?
5. Ask to see and review the trainer's materials **BEFORE** they are presented to your people.

QUESTIONS FOR REFERENCES OF TRAINERS

Ask for references...and actually call and ask such questions as:

1. How did the majority of people respond to the trainer?
2. Was the session easy to follow?
3. Were the attendees engaged throughout the session? Did the trainer hold their attention?
4. What were the learning points that were covered?
5. Were the attendees able to walk away with specific tools/skills they could apply immediately?
6. Were the attendees able to apply these skills later?
7. Did the attendees want the trainer to come back and do more sessions with them?
8. Did this trainer help or hurt your overall training program?

TRAINING RANK-AND-FILE EMPLOYEES

Whenever I discuss training with a potential client, the question always arises as to whether we should also put the rank-and-file employees through the training program. Well ... it depends on what kind of training the organization is considering.

For instance, if an organization is looking at training its managers in “Leadership and Motivation,” or “Effective Interviewing,” or some area relating to supervisory skills, then the answer would be “no.” Why would you ever put anyone through a training course that did not apply to them?

On the other hand, if the company is talking about training related to “Communication,” “Emotional Intelligence,” “Tolerance,” “Customer Service,” “Conflict Resolution,” or training in other types of “life skills,” then the answer would be **OF COURSE!** If communication is **really** going to be a two-way street in the organization, shouldn't both sides know what they are doing? If the employees are not trained in such areas, then it is ridiculous to think they will possess these skills when they engage their co-workers or superiors. If the managers needed training in these areas ... then why don't the employees?

If managers are trained in how to effectively communicate, yet they have an employee who continues to use an “attacking” or “retreating” style of communication ... more than likely, the communication will not progress. Why? Because one side is still obstructing the process, so little gets accomplished. This does not mean that the employee is a better or more effective communicator or that the employee will “win.” Instead, it only means one party will simply obstruct the process ... which is quite easy to do.

This concept is the same logic used in marriage counseling. Both sides must be coached in how to resolve conflict, communicate more honestly and respectfully, and so on. If only one spouse is educated in these skills, the other spouse will most likely continue to use the same poor communication and conflict resolution skills that created the problem in the first place. The result: Stalemate.

Also, training managers in these areas and not training employees sends a very clear message to the employees:

You are not as important as we are!
You are not worth this investment in training and mentoring.

And you want to have good employee relations...right?

Therefore, when organizations look at training managers, they should also consider what skills the employees will need in order for the company to accomplish their goals.

CONCLUSION

In the end, your managers and employees should enjoy coming to training. Training should **never** be a “chore.” It should be fun and enlightening for the attendees. They should **want** to come back for more sessions. Attendees should leave these sessions saying:

That was GREAT! When is the next one?

If attendees do not enjoy the training sessions, then your training program is doomed. One bad trainer or training program can kill your managers’ desire to attend your sessions. Bad trainers or bad training design also damages the internal HR person’s credibility.

Somewhere in our past we seem to have gotten the idea that learning and work should be painful. That is ridiculous...but it is the norm. Actually, “learning” and “education” have become so synonymous with “mental torture” that “TIME” magazine reported in the week of April 17, 2006 that 30% of all the students currently enrolled in American high schools will not graduate. They will drop out. A more shameful statistic is hard to imagine.

Human resource people should also survey their attendees to see how they enjoyed the session. Did they think it was worthwhile? What did they find most useful? What would they like to see in the future? The attendees’ collective opinions are very important to the future of your training program.

In the end, managers should thank you for putting on this training program for you...and they should want more. If that is not their overall response, you’ve made a mistake somewhere.