

Turning Learning Into Action

How to get more out of every training dollar

The Manager's Role in Training

Effectiveness of Training

American industries annually spend more than \$100 billion on training, but only 10 to 30% of this expenditure is actually transferred into results back in the workplace. This is according to a report written by Baldwin and Ford in 1992, and reconfirmed by Ford and Weissbein in 1997.

Australian companies spend \$4 billion dollars annually on training, and in most cases probably 90% of this money is wasted.

Instinctively, most executives know that current training programs are not achieving the results, even if they don't have measurable results.

After a good training program participants are inspired and committed to making changes and adopting the new skills. Indeed, most courses now make it easy for participants. They recap each day of the program emphasising what's important, get participants involved, use different learning styles all through the program, and finish the process with an action plan that everyone completes.

Yet, despite training program improvements over recent years, how many training folders are gathering dust under the desks in offices all around the country, and have never been opened again since the training program?

Behavioural Change

The first step to overcoming this waste of corporate time and money is to understand the key difference between the information and knowledge component of learning and the behavioural change component.

When training departments transitioned from training to learning and development this was a step in the right direction. The skills and knowledge piece of learning could be described as the training component. Chalk and talk for training had proven to be very ineffective, so the style was changed to become more interactive. Different accelerated learning techniques were introduced, and courses were designed to address different learning styles and preferences. All of this was an attempt to increase the effectiveness of training. It certainly helped, but the fundamental issue remains, that behavioural change rarely takes place on a two-day training course. Still today, investment by most companies is almost exclusively in skills and knowledge, not behavioural change.

Pre and Post Training

I agree with Broad and Newstrom who in their book, *Transfer of Training* (1992), demonstrate how each player - the manager, the participant and the trainer - have important roles to play before and after the training process. It shows that what is most influential for the successful transfer of training back into the work place is the manager's role and the participant's role before the event, and then the manager's role after the event.

However, I believe other important questions still need to be raised.

Consider - to what extent do your managers work with participants before a training program to clarify expectations and the outcomes that are required?

While getting the pre-course process correct is very valuable, and because it is relatively simple most companies are now doing this by simply including pre-work material and pre-work discussions with the manager and this does indeed impact on the success of a training course. But, I believe the real gold is available after the training course.

Why Not the Manager?

I believe that Broad and Newstrom's assumption that it's only the managers who can influence the behavioural changes back in the work place is obsolete. Yes, they are on hand, but they are rarely best placed to support candidates. In fact, in many cases, I would suggest that the manager is the last person who should be chosen to support candidates back in the work place, especially considering what makes behavioural change successful.

So let's take a look at what happens when individuals return from training courses and use this to understand the impact of the role of the manager. They have learnt some new skills that are relevant to them in their role and will create better results for them if implemented. They are inspired and brimming with enthusiasm and committed to doing things differently.

Then what happens? There is an inbox full of emails to answer, the workload has piled up while they were away. Priorities shift and, although they had cleared the decks to the best of their ability, they are now snowed under again. The immediate focus moves from new ideas to fire fighting. Their time and energy is in full demand. Their manager wants to see them, their team needs them. The training folder gets put aside.... they'll get to it later in the week.

So can the manager intervene at this stage and save the day? The expectation is that the manager will sit down with the participants and review the course, what they learnt and what they need to do differently.

In many cases managers are too busy to sit down with participants post a training course. They want the

training to be implemented, but the constraints and pressures of the current environment means that these very important, but not urgent, meetings rarely happen.

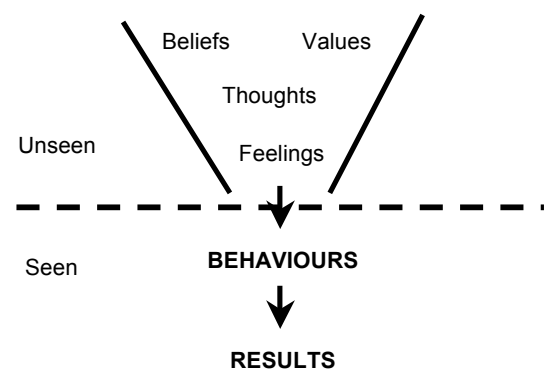
Lack of time is blamed for many problems in the work place today. However, I believe one of the reasons that managers rarely find time to have such meetings is that they know the meetings rarely get the required results, and they're right. A single meeting will not get the required results, the follow up needs to be consistent over a period of time.

Why is it that when a follow up meeting does happen managers are still ineffective?

How Behavioural Change Occurs

Behavioural change doesn't happen quickly, it happens over a period of time. The level of change required by the individual depends on the skills or knowledge being implemented. For example, with training that is non-emotional, such as systems and procedures, the behaviour is relatively easy to change. It's a logical thought process and rarely involves an individual's belief system. However, if you're talking about team building skills, communication, sales and leadership, these require a higher level of personal commitment to change and for the individual to operate beyond a surface level of change.

The model below shows that results are created by behaviours; and behaviours are created by our thoughts and feelings. Thoughts and feelings are often shaped by beliefs and values.



Behaviours can be changed by purely focusing on the behaviour itself, but it's much easier and more efficient to look at the thoughts and feelings above the line.

Addressing values, beliefs and fears means the behaviours usually change very rapidly.

Managers and Behavioural Change

The question that needs to be asked is how well trained are managers to discuss challenges to implementation with employees at a thinking/feeling level?

Even if some managers do have the ability to have a quality coaching style conversation, how many employees would be willing to sit down and discuss their fears openly with their manager? By most employees it would be considered inappropriate indeed. This is particularly difficult if the manager is involved in the process of deciding which employee gets the next promotion.

Non-Managerial Support

I believe that for the reasons of time, skills and appropriateness, managers are not best placed to support individuals once they return to the work place post a training program.

So what can be done to support and help participants implement post training what they have learnt, if we consider that managers are not the people best placed to do so?

I believe corporations have a real need to address this behavioural change piece. Options include:

- Create an internal team of implementation specialists who are trained to work with individuals one on one after the training process. These can be from human resources or from other departments.
- Encourage individuals to buddy up with other learners on their course and provide them with a structured process to work through post training. The process could include a series of briefings with specific questions to add reflection and learning.

- Outsource the support required by individuals post the training process.
- Utilise 'e-learning' systems to create an accountability process post learning events.
- Raise the awareness of participants to the challenges they face with implementation post training courses and offer self-coaching exercises to support action plans created in the training program.
- Create materials and job aids that help with reflection and learning post a training course.

For all of the processes above managers do have a role in supporting the participants. Also, involvement of the managers in the decision of which process to choose ensures their full support.

I believe that together you and your management team can reverse the trend of wasted training dollars and begin to maximise your investment. I wish you well as you take steps to turn learning, within your organisation, into action.

Emma Weber

Lever Learning, Founder and Director

*Lever Learning is leading the field of learning specialists who are supporting companies to meet their needs and **turn learning into action**. Lever Learning offers both advisory or implementation consultations, not offering training itself, but working alongside current training programs. Services include face to face briefings, telephone action sessions. Each service is tailored for the individual client. To talk to a **Learning Transfer** specialist to discuss your current training programs please call our office on 02 8221 8833 and ask to speak to Emma Weber.*