

HERE ARE 12 IDEAS TO PRODUCE TECHNICAL TRAINING FASTER,  
MAKE IT LONGER LASTING AND MORE COST EFFECTIVE.

# TWELVE IDEAS TOWARD EFFECTIVE TRAINING

BY EDWARD J.  
FEENEY

With the current recession, training departments must concentrate on producing measurable, on-the-job performance change in high-payoff areas if they are to continue to keep their jobs, obtain budgetary approval for new programs and get the top-management recognition they deserve.

Often during difficult economic times, management develops what is commonly called a "paper clip-philosophy" — cutting back on very small items with no great economic significance while overlooking the huge payoffs that can come from improving human performance.

It is during these times that training departments can be most useful.

In the 14 years that I have been observing training departments in various organizations, I have developed a number of recommendations to help improve on-the-job employee performance change.

The following is a 12-point checklist designed to improve the

quality of performance:

## I. Performance Improvement Analysis

One of the first steps in improving performance involves doing a performance improvement analysis (PIA) to define and establish measurable standards for what the organization, department or individual trainee should produce as outputs of performance and what the economic payoff is at improving these outputs. Training directors should think like a vice president of finance looking at a profit and loss statement, but expressing it in human performance improvement terms.

Too often, the approach is, "Oh, boy! Do I have a training solution. Now let's go find a problem." Many times we find that training departments concentrate on training programs which have very little potential economic payoff for the organization.

## II. Measure the Baseline

Over and over again we find that training programs have been decided upon without any attempt to quantify actual, on-the-job per-

formance prior to initiation of a training program. Without a baseline measurement of performance, management cannot judge whether the performance improvement program is successful.

What is your organization's, department's, or subordinate's current level of performance? It's important to conduct this measurement because it identifies whether or not a problem actually exists, the degree to which it exists, and provides management with later proof of program success.

All outputs of performance, and even key behaviors, can be quantified and measured objectively. This generally can be accomplished by reviewing past records, performance reports, or customer complaints, or by discreet on-the-job observations.

## III. Calculate Economic Payoff

All performance problems should be quantified in dollars and cents in order to select those with the highest payoff potential. It is not uncommon to find one task or job worth a hundred to a thousand times as much as another, yet they

are often given equal stress in training.

In one organization, for instance, the training department placed high emphasis on improving the number of deliveries made within one day after parcel pick-up. However, when a market research study of customers' actual buying habits was conducted, it was determined that 40 percent of the customers who stopped using the company's service did so because of extended delivery delays (seven days, 14 days, 30 days). Training employees to prevent these extended delays, not increasing the number of deliveries made by the first day, represented the greatest payoff for the company, but went largely unrecognized by management.

#### IV. Cause Analysis

Any program designed to improve employee performance requires the adoption of a systems approach to determine both the internal and external factors affecting employee output.

Such an analysis should ask the following questions:

- Are the standards for performance specific?
- What types of feedback systems are provided to the worker, supervisor, or manager?
- What are the consequences to the worker? In many instances employees are actually penalized for good performance. An employee who completes a job before deadline is often given additional work to do.

About 75 percent of the time, it is often found that lack of measurement and effective feedback can be a major cause of performance problems. Other causes of performance deficiencies involve lack of positive consequences for a job well done, lack of tools and equipment necessary to do the job, or policies and procedures that work against good performance.

#### V. Observe Actual Performance

What people say is often different than what they do. Actually, observing employee performance provides valuable information about the realistic problems encountered on the job, helps identify

the causes of performance problems, and also pinpoints the stimuli which prompts employee reactions.

#### VI. Concentrate More on the Stimuli

It has been stated that every person can make the responses a pilot of a 747 makes in flying an airplane. They can turn knobs, pull levers, talk on the radio, etc. What they do not know is the stimuli part of the job — when to do it, or what the signals are to make those

responses.

In obtaining behavior change, the trainee will often be told what responses to make, but will not be told when to make the response. The result is the trainee simply does not pick up the signal to perform.

For an assembly-line worker, the part moving down the assembly line would serve as the stimulus to action. For a salesperson, the stimulus would be the needs expressed by the customer. What

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**"When two workers exhibit sharply divergent reactions to the same stimuli, additional training is obviously needed."**

are the trainees' responses to the stimuli? When two workers exhibit sharply divergent reactions to the same stimuli, additional training is obviously needed.

### **VII. Consider Alternatives to Training**

Training is still a very expensive solution, though very economical if attained in high-payoff areas and when lack of knowledge is truly the cause of performance problems. But there are other ways to get information across. Two of the most effective ways are:

A. Provide feedback and positive consequences for good performance. One of the greatest tools for improving the quality of employee performance is development of an effective feedback system so that employees can constantly measure how their per-

formance compares to company goals. Positive consequences for good performance serve to reinforce the desired behavior. Positive consequences do not necessarily have to consist of financial rewards, but may take the form of praise, official recognition, or promotion to greater responsibilities.

B. Use more job aids in lieu of training. Job aids could simply be specific behavioral descriptions of what the trainee must do in response to a certain stimuli.

### **VIII. Always State Terminal Behaviors for Training Programs**

Terminal behaviors here are statements of what the trainee is to do at the completion of training that is measurable and observable. Although many training directors know how to write terminal behaviors, they either fail to do this for the program and deal only in broad generalities, or the terminal behaviors they write are faulty; i.e., they express only a general description of what is to be changed but none of it is measurable.

### **IX. Use Feedback After Training**

Unless there is some kind of natural or contrived feedback after training, there is no way a trainee can perform properly. This is particularly true of sales training programs where the feedback usually is tied only to the results that are achieved, but seldom to the sales behaviors that produce those results; i.e., there is feedback on how many dollars you sell, but seldom any feedback system on whether or not you probed for needs, determined whether or not the prospect can make the decisions, etc.

### **X. Apply Positive and Negative Consequences to Performance**

Unless there is some kind of consequence system for the performer, either on a positive or negative basis, the trainee simply will not exhibit the desired behavior. One hotel chain, for example, wanted

their desk clerks to ask those registering whether they needed an advance reservation. The consequence was that if the person registering was not asked, they got their room free with the desk clerk paying for it. The desk clerk never failed to ask.

### **XI. Measure On-the-Job Performance Change After Training**

This measurement program must be instituted to provide the same kind of feedback to the employee, the manager of that trainee, and to the training department. It should be an on-going, speedometer-type feedback system. It tells us in training whether or not we are successful and enables us to prove to management that we have obtained the results and allows us to correct our approach if we don't produce the desired effects.

Too often, there is no measurement whatsoever of on-the-job change, or it is expressed in terms of general impressions of change, rather than specific measurements of outputs or objectively stated behaviors.

### **XII. Developing Your Own Training Staff**

Obtaining on-the-job consulting help while sending members of your own staff away to workshops is helpful. The biggest behavior change often will come from having your less experienced members work with an experienced internal/external consultant as they conduct a performance improvement analysis, calculate the economic payoffs, write terminal behaviors, measure results, etc.

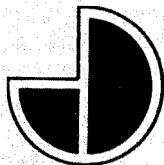
Edward J. Feeney is president of Edward J. Feeney Associates. The company offers products and systems which improve human performance in key payoff areas for organizations. Numerous articles on his work have been initiated by such publications as *Business Week*, *Psychology Today*, *Nation's Business*, *Sales Management*, *Training in Business and Industry* and others.



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