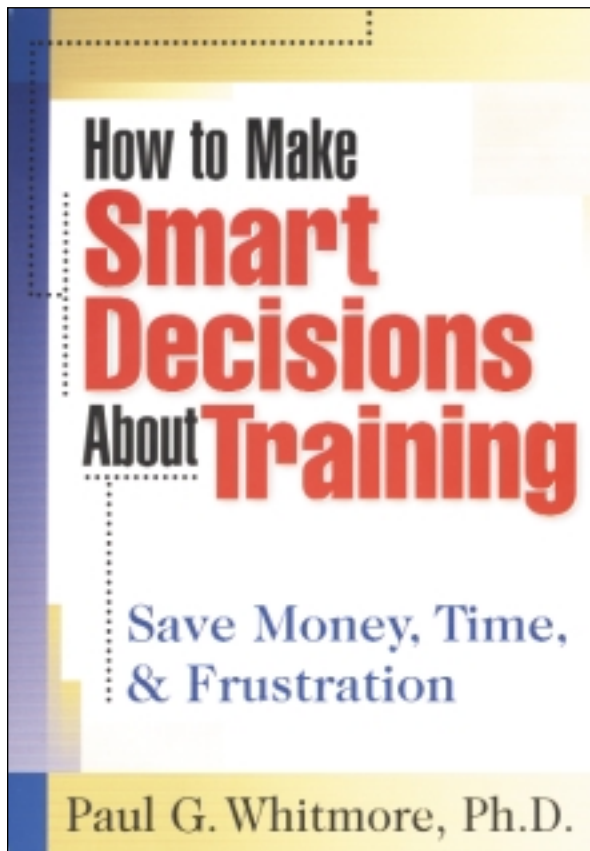


BOOKS



How to Make Smart Decisions About Training

By Paul G. Whitmore

Reviewed by Milo T. Sindell

What training method exists that can meet the increasing demands of effective training? The answer suggested by Paul D. Whitmore, author of *How to Make Smart Decisions About Training*, is simple: criterion-referenced instruction. The magic, as Whitmore states, of CRI is that it's a training process that focuses on simple, yet critical, training components based upon behavioral and neuroscience research.

CRI focuses on three key areas of training: defining and measuring desired outcomes; focusing on performance success; and designing training that reflects the needs of the learner,

not the instructional process. Calling CRI "magic" may be a bit of an exaggeration, but Whitmore's coverage of the topic does provide an excellent overview of what CRI is and how to identify, purchase, or develop CRI training within an organization.

While the language Whitmore uses to explain CRI and its links to neuroscience and behavioral psychology is a bit pedantic, he makes a clear connection between the practice of behaviors, new learning, and strengthened connections of neurons in the brain. Basically, employees learn through doing.

To enable employees to learn new skills, however, trainers must specify what skills they want employees to learn, develop situations that encourage performance of those skills, and create learning experiences that participants react positively to.

With that baseline established, Whitmore maps out a well-defined, nine-step course of action. Those steps set the stage for designing and implementing a successful CRI program:

1. Identify a clear and significant business need for training.
2. Ensure that training focuses on specific skills employees currently lack, yet need, to support organizational objectives.
3. Identify and describe the skills and related training tasks, and establish a correlation between those tasks and measurable on-the-job performance.
4. Ensure that learners practice every skill in a format that relates to their work.
5. Ensure that new skills are applied in the correct combinations and in response to the appropriate situations.
6. Enable participants to practice new skills and behaviors to integrate the training successfully.
7. Ensure that at least half of the training time is spent practicing new skills.
8. Focus on providing participants with a positive learning experience.
9. Ensure that the value the program provides is greater than its cost.

A fast read, the book balances a broad overview of how to design training based on the CRI process with realistic insights into the potential pitfalls

and organizational hurdles of initiating and launching a training program.

Whitmore is refreshingly realistic when discussing the demands of a fast-paced work environment, ever-shrinking training budgets, and potential skepticism from upper management. He maintains a focus on developing training that's performance-centered and articulates the differences between traditional classroom settings and the demands of the business environment, where training success is based on increased employee and, therefore, organizational success.

Whitmore also covers the more subtle elements of training. In particular, he discusses the effects of learning within a high-pressure environment in which you're requested to demonstrate new skills in front of an audience. Whitmore emphasizes that for successful training and CRI, trainers must create safe environments for learning. That means trainers should remove potentially stressful situations and provide coaching to increase the probability that participants will develop self-confidence in their new skills and an eagerness to apply those skills to the job.

Coincidentally, while reading Whitmore's book I attended a two-day training course on business process redesign. With the CRI concepts fresh in mind, I drew upon its methods to define my expectations, ask effective questions of the trainers, and, during the exercises, focus my participation on the relevancy to my job.

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ON THE NIGHT STAND

By Karin B. Evans



A book makes it to my nightstand because it gets me thinking about what in the world I'm doing, or should do, or could do in my work with organizations.

Terrence Deal and Allen Kennedy's *Corporate Cultures* was the first book to hit me like that. Back when my nightstand was the edge of my college dorm bunk, this book seduced me into the field of organizational development. A perfect primer, it outlines the critical questions for understanding and building a culture: What are our values? How do we do things around here? Who are our heroes, and what are their stories?

Superleadership and *Business Without Bosses*, both written by Charles Manz and Henry Sims in the early stages of the movement to empower work teams, explain in reader-friendly terms what it means to lead others to lead themselves—a concept I teach and, I hope, apply in my work as a leader.

The Future of Leadership, edited by Warren Bennis, Gretchen Spreitzer, and Thomas Cummings, is the book currently on my nightstand. At Verizon, we like it so much that we purchased copies for our leadership development candidates. It's a fascinating collection of writings from some of the most accomplished leadership thinkers of the last century. It's thought provoking and provides a definition of leadership by Karl Weick that I think is one of the best definitions I've encountered. What is it? You'll have to read the book!

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BOOKS

Trainers must
create **safe**
environments
for learning.

Potential pitfalls

Whitmore pontificates a little too much, and his discussion of ROI and training valuation could be stronger. If readers wish to understand fully how powerful brain science can be as a basis for the way humans learn, they'll have to do a little research on their own: Whitmore's explanation is too simplistic and leaves out a host of valuable information. Finally, Whitmore claims that to be effective, training "has to guarantee that learners will master job-critical skills and gain the self-confidence to perform to management expectations. CRI is the only training methodology that can meet that critical business need." That's a big pill to swallow.

Trainers will value this book as a resource for planning, outlining, and developing a comprehensive CRI program. Even if you're an experienced trainer who has done things your own way for many years, you'll find valuable elements of the CRI process that can improve any training program.

How to Make Smart Decisions About Training, by Paul G. Whitmore. Atlanta: CEP Press, www.ceppress.com. 155 pp. US\$22.95

Circle 290 on reader service card.

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