Don't let good training fly out the window. Use Level 3 to make sure it sticks.

On the Level

By George Vellios

At 4:59 p.m. you are making closing statements to a group of managers enrolled in a management development class by their supervisors. After eight hours of role play, simulations, and case studies, you distribute smile sheets to gauge what the participants thought or felt about the training. You receive a round of applause as you conclude with, "Thank you all for coming."

The next day, your peers and a senior manager ask, "How was the training?" In response, you glance at the smile sheets, notice that most participants circled the highest score choice, and say, "It went great. They loved it."

This is where training results enter a gray area instead of what should be a black and white picture. The question asked was, "How was the training?" That question is quite ambiguous, inviting a variety of answers. The keyword in that question is, "was," as if to state that training is a terminal event, that we now have improved the skill, behavior, or knowledge of each participant. After all, many participants wrote in the comments section how excited they are to apply this new learning.

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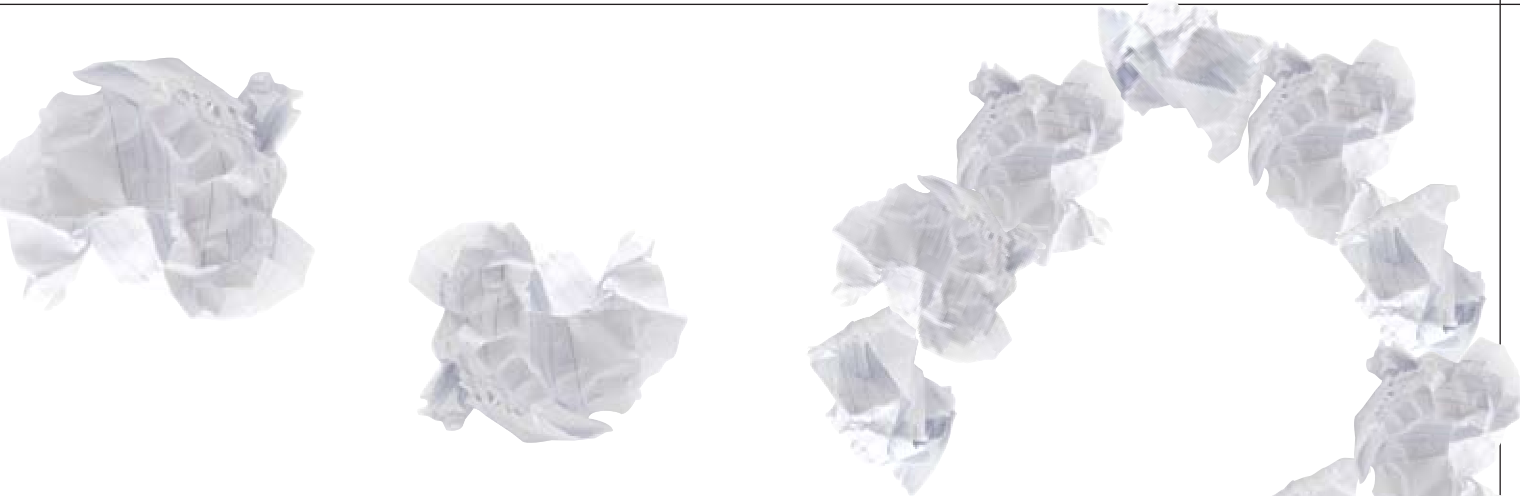

As a trainer, you briefed, asked questions, and checked for understanding. Heck, you may have even had a post-training assessment completed to validate the training and measure their learning—a Level 2 requirement. Now you really can't wait to be asked, "How was the training?" You are eager to show off post assessment learning scores with a fancy spreadsheet and graphs.

Then, a funny thing happens. Two months pass, and a significant number of those participants who scored high on reaction and learning are now asking for copies of the handouts, when the next refresher course is offered, or about a principle or method that was discussed during the training. This is the point where the real answer to the question, "How was the training?" should be answered.

As the most challenging of evaluations, Level 3 seeks to evaluate whether the participants successfully transferred their skills and behaviors into the workplace. Level 3 evaluations help identify impediments to successful knowledge and skills transfer. What is staggering is that research indicates that only between 10 and 20 percent of managers successfully transfer behaviors into the workplace. Not exactly the type of numbers one would want to produce during budget time.

False assurance

When a New York-based healthcare organization implemented a management development training program, the participants were either newly promoted or

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recently hired. In what can be described as a very volatile, dynamic organization, making time to attend the training was one challenge; making sure the training was successful was another.

In this example, 20 managers were trained throughout a three-day period consisting of eight-hour days. Coaching and counseling, interpersonal skills, and conflict resolution were among the training modules offered. Level 1 showed, to no one's surprise, that everyone was quite happy and eager to put their training to use. Level 2 was also encouraging since participants demonstrated a significant level of learning. So far so good, right? Well, not exactly.

There seemed to be a gap from what was learned and displayed during the training, and what was actually transferred and used in the workplace. The participants, who represented various branch locations across the tri-state area, were reaching out to the training facilitator and requesting refresher training, for one. Issues such as managing poor-performing employees,

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How to Apply Kirkpatrick's Four Levels of Evaluation

By Donald L. Kirkpatrick

While most workplace learning and performance professionals are familiar with my four levels of evaluation, some still don't know how to implement them into their training programs.

I have put together some guidelines for each of the four levels and suggestions for how to apply them.

Level 1: Reaction Guidelines

1. List all the items from which you want to get reaction, including items dealing with the content such as, "Did it meet the needs of the participants and the instructor?" and items dealing with audio-visual aids, case studies, handouts, meals, the facilities, and the schedule.
2. Design a form that will quantify reactions.
3. Encourage written comments and suggestions.
4. Get 100 percent immediate reaction.
5. Get honest responses by making the form anonymous.
6. Communicate the responses to the appropriate people.

To implement these guidelines, have a comment (smile) sheet available for participants to complete before they leave and convene a focus group of six or eight participants after a month to openly discuss the reaction results.

Level 2: Learning Guidelines

1. Evaluate knowledge, skills, and attitudes before and after the program.
2. Use a "paper-and-pencil" test to measure changes in knowledge and attitudes.
3. Use a performance test in the classroom to measure changes in skills.
4. Get 100 percent response.
5. Communicate the amount of learning to the appropriate people.

If changes in knowledge and attitudes are being measured, a pretest should be made for the program content. The post-test should be identical to the pretest—why make two different tests to measure the same information

If you are measuring changes in skills, a pretest of performance should be made and compared with a performance post-test. If the course is teaching presentation skills, an expert should measure each participant on performance against certain standards. The post-test should measure the same type of presentation and again be evaluated by the expert. This needs to be done for each person.

If you are teaching a new subject, there is no need for a pretest. To measure if the participants have learned a new technique, create a role play exercise with participants playing the parts of coach, coachee, and observer. The participants will change roles until each has performed all three roles.

conflict resolution, and communication were not decreasing as a result of training. The HR department's data showed an increase of 22 percent in terms of internal complaints regarding management processes. What went wrong?

In the preceding example, the training facilitator conducted a detailed interview and survey with all of the participants who attended the training. Data was analyzed using content analysis to depict key themes and variables which acted as barriers for successful transfer of behaviors to the workplace. The use of Level 3 evaluations was an eye-opener for the organization. The data told the real story.

Seventy percent of the participants claimed that they were overwhelmed with day-to-day work and didn't have the opportunity to use their newly acquired skills. This caused them to resort back to old behaviors. This also resulted in the participants forgetting what was learned.

Sixty percent of the participants stated that their own managers didn't consider training to be of primary importance. Management didn't follow up on the progress or assess their use of the skill. Of this group, only 15 percent stated that their supervisors reinforced their training through developmental goals.

Changing course

Based on the survey findings, the following corrective action steps were implemented by the training function at the healthcare organization in an effort to remedy the situation.

First, establish partnerships with executives to incorporate professional development learning and use as part of their work goals. The goals would cascade down to their subordinates, creating an overall buy-in and personal investment to training.

Next, promote a culture within the organization advocating training. To create this culture, managers should partake in train-the-trainers, and serve as training facilitators.

Finally, train subject matter experts on how to conduct Level 3 evaluation surveys. This process enabled the organization to create a training committee, where key themes were explored for management and technical training.

Level 3 was critical to the success of training at this organization. Everyone became an advocate for the training. The corrective action steps were incorporated and significant changes were made. This was best illustrated 12 months after the corrective action implementation took place.

A group of 38 managers were evaluated based on training they had participated in within the last year. Data in this particular study showed that only 19 percent claimed time constraints as a barrier, and only 11 percent stated that support from management was not present. HR data also reported a 66 percent decrease in internal complaints regarding management processes. A paradigm shift had occurred in terms of gathering and evaluating data to target key barriers for successful implementation.

So when someone now asks you, "How was the training?" feel free to answer that very complicated question with a simple response: "What you can't see, Level 3."

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How to Apply ... cont.

Level 3: Behavior Guidelines

1. If practical, measure on a before-and-after basis to determine what change has taken place.
2. Allow the proper amount of time for the change to occur.
3. Get information from the learner as well as from one or more of the following people:
   a) The learner's supervisor
   b) A peer who works closely with the learner
   c) One or more subordinates of the learner—be careful because many people do not want their subordinates to get involved. Be sure to check with the learner, who might select certain people to interview or survey.
4. Get a sample of the learners to evaluate. Obviously, the larger the sample, the more weight the results would carry.

Learners who attended a program on "How to orient and train employees" can be evaluated the first time they hire a new employee, but, if you are evaluating a participant of a course on leadership, you should wait three months or more before evaluating behaviors.

To evaluate behavior, use a patterned interview that asks the same questions of each learner so the responses can be quantified. Make sure you ask how much the participant has changed since he attended the program. If little or no change has occurred, ask what prevented the behavior change and include reasons such as the things I learned did not apply to my job, I had higher priorities, I tried the techniques but it didn't work out, my boss discouraged or prevented me from changing, or other reason.

When interviewing the learner, persons might not want to say "little" or "not at all" because it may make them look bad. So, be sure to ask for honest answers and emphasize that the purpose of the interview is not to evaluate the person, but the program.

Another technique is to use a survey instead of the interview, a focus group of selected learners, or storytelling with a group of learners.

Level 4: Results Guidelines

1. Measure before and after the training.
2. Allow time for results to take place.
3. Repeat the evaluation at appropriate times.
4. Be satisfied with evidence if proof is not possible.

There is no magic answer to these statements. Use your judgment. If you want to measure the results of a leadership or coaching program, the first measurement may be completed in six months and the second in a year. But if you want to measure increase in sales from a new selling approach, you may want to start measuring after two or three months and again after six months and a year.

To evaluate results of a training program, ask a focus group of selected learners what results they have achieved and how much money was saved. This would include not only what they did when they returned to the job, but also any new department initiatives because of the ideas and suggestions they brought back.

I hope I have given you some guidelines and techniques to help you evaluate. The next thing you can do is adapt forms, procedures, ideas, and techniques from other organizations.

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