

Look At Your Training Objectives

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An infantry colonel met an Irish sergeant and said, "Sergeant, I heard you around the camp this morning shooting at random." Murphy replied, "Yes, sir, and I hit it, too."

Training, like ammunition, may be wasted if the gun is not aimed. It may also be wasted if aimed at something of no importance. An objective is a target for the instructor and the trainees. It tells the observers, too, what the training is aimed at. It is the basis for judgment of the marksmanship.

Jackey and Barlow say, "The objective is the most important consideration in preparing to teach a trade."¹

Hazel F. Young wrote, "A real objective is of primary importance. It must be formulated with care. One must write down the objective, face it squarely, and determine if it encompasses the things you and your class hope to achieve today."²

John T. Wahlquist emphasizes the value of an objective. "The best teaching involves consciousness of definite

purposes accepted after due deliberation. The first step in lesson planning is to select an appropriate objective, within the range of the students' lives and needs."³

The objective has a number of specific values:

It RELATES the training to the need
It DETERMINES the nature of the training

It FIXES the content of the course
It CONTROLS the selection of methods and procedure

It LIMITS the background of related material

It PROVIDES a starting point for organizing the lesson

It GIVES purpose to the teaching-learning situation

It GUIDES the instructor during the lesson

It FORMS the basis for checking achievement

Look at your training course outlines. There should be a written objective for the course and one for each lesson. You

¹ Jackey and Barlow, *The Craftsman Prepares to Teach* - Macmillan 1950

² Hazel F. Young, "Build Lessons Around Real Objectives," *The Instructor* - December 1955, p 378

³ Dr. John T. Wahlquist, *Teaching as the Direction of Activities*

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will probably find that many have no written objective at all. Of the objectives you do find, a large number will be poorly worded. In some cases the so-called objectives are not objectives at all.

At this point, do not look in the dictionary for the definition of "objective." It is not just a synonym for aim or goal. It is a technical term of the teaching profession. Educators define an objective as a statement of what the learner is to accomplish or a statement of a condition to be attained by the learner. These accomplishments or conditions are the end products or outcomes of training. They are skills and abilities, information and knowledge, and concepts and attitudes.

The proper words must be used in stating an objective. They should describe what the learner is expected to achieve in the particular learning experience.

Some Useful Words for Stating an Objective:

Basic Verbs:

Learn	Understand
Master	Appreciate
Know	Respect

Secondary Words:

Verbs:	Nouns:
Gain	Skill
Acquire	Ability
Attain	Capacity
Develop	Qualification
Achieve	Technique
Establish	Competence

Here are a few examples of objectives written with meaningful words. Each one states what should be accomplished by the learner.

To *Learn* How to Operate an ABC Fork Lift Truck.

To *Appreciate* the Importance of Security Measures.

To *Acquire* Skill in Silver Soldering.

To *Become* Familiar With the New Scheduling Procedures.

To *Increase* Ability to Handle Problems on the Job.

Avoid meaningless words in writing an objective. Look at the following examples of poorly-worded objectives:

To *discuss* better business letters.

To *review* the grievance procedure.

To *examine* the causes of absenteeism.

Why is the instructor discussing, reviewing, or examining the subject? If he knows, why not state it? These words describe the method of instruction rather than the objective. There is no statement of the learning that is to take place. Consequently, there is no basis for evaluation.

A Few Poor Words for Stating an Objective:

instruct	show
discuss	indicate
study	emphasize
review	practice
present	illustrate
examine	analyze

Training in business and industry is usually done for a very definite purpose or need. This need (the reason for giving the course) is not the same as the objective (what the trainees are to learn). Confusing need and objective tends to confuse thinking about training and makes evaluation of training almost impossible.

For instance, poor quality might be a current problem in a certain plant. An

improvement might be effected by certain actions which could possibly include some training of the operators. If training were done, the need or purpose would be "to improve quality." An *objective* might be "to become familiar with quality standards."

Appraising the value of training in dollars and cents is difficult because it is usually based on a false premise. We speak of one activity and measure another. Training imparts learning; it does not put it to work. The situation might be compared to the man who planted an apple tree because he wanted apple pies. Then he was dissatisfied because the tree produced apples and not pies.

It is not the training that produces the tangible results but the application of it. The training man should, quite properly, be concerned with operating results, but these results must be evaluated separately and on a different basis from training.

Training should be evaluated on the learning that results from the training. Management, perhaps, should be evaluated on how well that learning is utilized.

A course entitled "Precision Inspection" had this stated objective: To Reduce Man-Hours Needed for Maintenance of Precision Measuring Tools. This is a statement of why the course was needed, but it gives no indication of what the trainees are to be taught. It is not the objective, but the purpose. A properly-stated objective would have brought into focus the relationship of the training needs and other factors contributing to high maintenance. It would not be right to evaluate training on how much maintenance had been reduced.

In most cases, this is exactly what happens because the need is mistaken for the *objective*.

One company had a ten-hour course on their union contract. The stated objective was "to reduce grievances." Actually, that might have been the purpose but it was not the objective. The objective was "to understand the union contract." Stated in this way, it immediately gives the administrator an opportunity to consider whether this course will actually achieve the purpose (to reduce grievances). It will also simplify the evaluation of the training. If the trainees understood the union contract, the training achieved its goal. A test could be given to measure the learning. Whether or not this training was applied is not properly an evaluation of the training.

Here is another objective taken from an industrial training course: To Fill the Need for Additional Form-Block Makers. Again, there is no statement of what the trainee is to learn. It is the purpose or training need that has been described, not the objective. It is a good thing to state the purpose at the beginning of a training course outline, but the purpose cannot substitute for a good, clearly-stated objective.

Writing a training course or outline without writing an objective is like building a house without a foundation. The objective is fundamental:

1. It is a requirement for the executives responsible for making decisions about training. It tells them what learning will take place and permits judgment as to whether the learning will meet the training need. It helps them integrate the training into a

larger pattern of management action which will bring the desired results.

2. The instructor needs the objective, not only as a goal, but as a guide in preparing and teaching the course or lesson. A teacher cannot do his job properly without it. A sound objective, therefore, is one indication of a competent teacher. The objective should be his first consideration. It should be written and not just in his head.
3. It is important to the student, too, as a stated objective may contribute greatly to the effectiveness of the learning situation. People learn only what they want to learn. When the learner sees a relationship between the goal and his needs and values, he is stimulated to learn because his motives (needs and values) can be satisfied in that way.¹
4. An objective is the basis for the evaluation of training. Any evaluation must be made with particular reference to the principal objective of a project or activity. If this objective is missing, obscure, or erroneously

stated, there is small wonder that difficulty is encountered in determining whether the training hit the mark.

Here are a few guides for writing an objective:

1. Make it consistent with the program or real training needs.
2. Set goals attainable within the limits of the learning situation and the time available.
3. Keep it within the experience, maturity, and comprehension of the trainee.
4. Make the objective specific.
5. Make it single and simple—rather than compound and complex.
6. Write in terms of outcomes which may be achieved by the trainee through activities selected for him.
7. Write in terms of the learner rather than the instructor.
8. Confine the objective to measurable accomplishments.

Examine some of your training course objectives and check them against the Check List. Practice rewriting them until they meet the criteria.

CHECK LIST FOR A TRAINING OBJECTIVE

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|---|--------------|
| 1. Does the objective meet a training need? | Yes... No... |
| 2. Is it consistent with the general aims of the program? | Yes... No... |
| 3. Is it significant and important? | Yes... No... |
| 4. Is the objective clear-cut and specific? | Yes... No... |
| 5. Is it within the understanding of the trainee? | Yes... No... |
| 6. Does it set goals that can be accomplished? | Yes... No... |
| 7. Can they be accomplished in the training situation? | Yes... No... |
| 8. Is the objective reasonable for the time available? | Yes... No... |
| 9. Is it expressed in terms of the trainee? | Yes... No... |
| 10. Does it state measurable goals? | Yes... No... |

¹ Asahel D. Woodruff, *The Psychology of Teaching* - Longmans, Green & Co., Inc., 1951