# Making It Matter

The importance of training and development to the successful conduct of business is one of this country's all-time, best-kept secrets. It's an issue nibbled at by economists, labor theorists, business professors, and even by today's populist apostles of excellence, but no highly visible institution or person claims and champions it.

ASTD has for several years marshalled the attention of legislators, policy makers, and business leaders around the idea that training matters, but hard evidence has been in short supply.    Many of you undoubtedly can prove the worth of training and development to the line managers and even to the top executives in your company, but what you know probably isn't available to other companies nor to the profession at large. For every large, prominent, and successful company such as Motorola, IBM, or Xerox, that uses training as a deliberate strategy for success, and says so publicly, there are thousands more where it languishes invisibly in some departmental backwater.

ASTD, understandably, has a big stake in demonstrating that training matters. In addition to wishing to advance the profession of its members, it recognizes the changing nature of many of your jobs and seeks to provide the tools you will need for effective performance in the future.

When the classroom is only a small part of the training picture, when one-on-one training means one computer and one learner, when expert systems can outperform even the most astute program designer, when we are all autonomous learners, your role will change.

Predictors say that instead of training and developing others in the time-honored way, many more of you will be involved in managing training better, accounting for it better, and finding ways to do it better. You will, in short, be doing work that supports and advances a critical business function. So convinced of this is ASTD that it has undertaken a major research project, underwritten by the U.S. Department of Labor, to identify the best methods for doing, managing, and accounting for training.

Called "Best Practices: What Works in Training and Development," the two-year study, underway since last November, will give training advocates valuable ammunition in the war against invisibility and irrelevance. "Best Practices," according to Anthony Carnevale, ASTD's chief economist and director of the project, will tell us more about why and how training matters to the corporation, to the nation's economy, and to the individual employee. The project will look at best practices in the organization and strategic role of training, basic skills training, technical training, the measurement of training, and managers and training. The researchers will cover everything from how training affects the economy and the marketplace, to how to make line supervisors aware of their training role. Their findings will be based on actual programs in practice—hard evidence that will give shape—visibility and dimension—to the incorporeal idea that training matters. As the project begins to bear fruit in the form of data, case histories, and procedures, the *Journal* will be publishing some of them.

"Best Practices" should bring good news to those people working at the development end of the spectrum who are tired of being dismissed as wily charismaticians with little to contribute to the bottom line. It should be good news for those who are tired of hearing that training can't be quantified, that best practices are too elusive, or any of the countless excuses that prevent people from collecting and naming best practices. It should be good news to those who want to see more refined questions and better defined answers to issues that have precluded training getting its due respect. It should be good news to those frustrated by trying to claim for training the credit for success gobbled up by other parts of the business equation. It should be good news for those wondering what on earth goes on in other companies that might help you become more credible, visible, and useful.

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