

# LEST WE TRAINERS FORGET

*intuitive judgment not enough for evaluation*

Perhaps the most common failing that we training and development personnel are susceptible to is by-passing the post-course evaluations on the assumption that we know the results anyway. This assumption, I believe, is usually correct. But therein lies the trouble . . .

Training evaluations, like beautiful women and old wine, are possessed of a mystique generally indefinable. So we don't even try to define these subjective/objective evaluation processes but rather engage in many-faceted descriptions of these wonders.

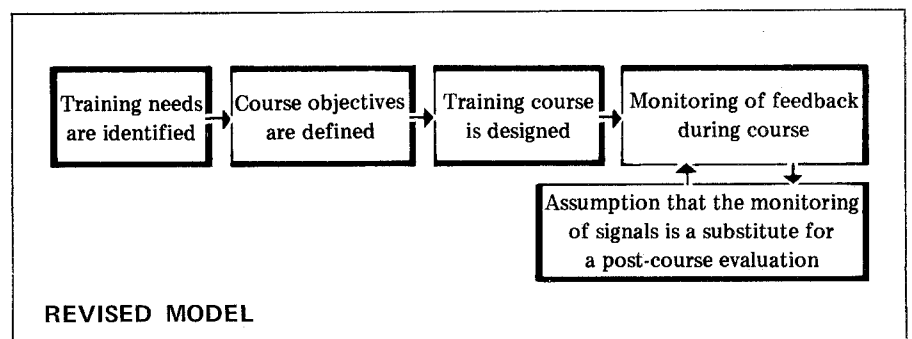
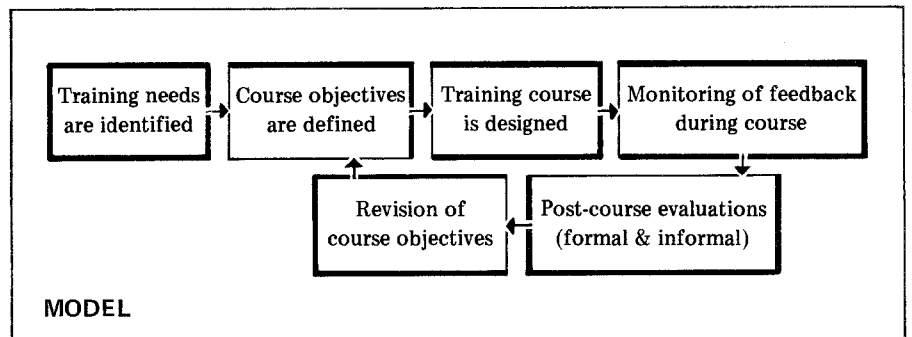
Thank God for the present-day impact of behavioral research because we are at last beginning to discover some meaningful pathways through the labyrinthian recesses of assessing behavioral change, which is the end product of our enterprise. However, many of these laboratory matrixes and models are not yet sufficiently refined and validated to enable them to be used widely. My thesis, then, is that we must for the present steer the middle course.

## THE MIDDLE COURSE

The middle course, in this context, is simply avoiding the two extremes of (1) conducting less sophisticated evaluations that will, or presumably will, provide feedback but not following through with a review and analysis of the feedback; (2) doing nothing meaningful and purposeful to follow up on a course/program/curriculum close-out because the results are presumed to be known. The assumption in both training behaviors is that the results are known intuitively. Let's talk about this a little further.

I doubt that many of us will quarrel with the statement that yes, we educators and trainers do in fact develop a certain feel, a certain expertise in assessing the impact of the training in progress. This is borne of experience and sophistication in the monitoring process, and this can be as real and as valid, I think, as it can be deadly.

The validity probably stems from this model:



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This is a functional pattern of instructor behavior, I believe. But unfortunately, it describes what for many of us is a recognizable pattern *only* at the outset of a course offering. It describes how we tend to behave at the time when we ourselves are becoming familiar with the course content.

It's deadly, however, because of the extreme ease with which we can construct a small-loop cycle, as illustrated in the revised model on page 42.

#### SUMMARY

I believe we can generalize that a combination of program content familiarity plus instructional expertise and training sophistication will enable one to predict over-all training effectiveness in most instances. However, this intuitive judgment will not suffice, in the absence of

objective data, to identify those trainees for whom the course objectives have not been attained. We certainly owe these the responsibility of assessing the reasons for the training ineffectiveness, but how is this proposed without an identification of the problem areas?

Further, there is discernible a tendency among educators and trainers, once they dispense with the process of analyzing post-course evaluations, to rely increasingly upon wholly subjective judgments in concluding that program objectives have been attained.

All of this conspires to point up the old saw about the two stages of ignorance: (1) not knowing (2) not knowing that you don't know. We who labor in this vineyard of training and development can ill afford either stage of ignorance.

Let's not flunk the course ourselves.

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