

FORWARD OBSERVER



Kirk-Chapnick's Level 5?

By Samantha Chapnick

Up until two weeks ago, I believed that Donald Kirkpatrick's four levels of evaluation were comprehensive; he pretty much had it covered. To paraphrase his model:

- Level 1: Trainee Perception. Was the participant cool with it?
- Level 2: Trainee Simulated Performance. Can he or she demonstrate acceptable competency in a simulated or artificial environment?
- Level 3: Trainee Second Nature. Have trainees integrated the instructional content into their everyday work?
- Level 4: Organizational Improvement. Is the company doing better than before the training?

I didn't see any holes until a conversation with Kent Vickery, an executive strategist who planted the seed for an aha! moment. Vickery has the skill and self-esteem to pursue psychological debates into shadowy corridors. Instead of relying on the crutch of statistics and Harvard studies, he uses intuition, experience, and observation. We'd previously discussed our common behaviorist roots. Looking at human motivation from an abstract perspective, we both see people as pleasure seekers and pain avoiders. This time, we approached our topic more pragmatically: What motivates people at work? What motivates them to learn? What

motivates them to seek training? Our talk led us to the conclusion that no evaluation model, including Kirkpatrick's, has captured the most critical driving force responsible for more learning retention than all of the compensation incentive plans combined: a higher calling. This higher calling is well illustrated in *The Little Prince*. The narrator, who often denigrates his drawing ability, explains why one of his drawings is superior to the others:

It's to warn my friends of a danger of which they, like myself, have long been unaware that I worked so hard on this drawing. The lesson I'm teaching is worth the trouble. You may be asking, "Why are there no other drawings in this book as big as the drawing of the baobabs?" There's a simple answer...when I drew the baobabs, I was inspired by a sense of urgency.

This realization made me think there needs to be another level, a Level 5, and there are two ways to approach it. The first is motivational and directly affects participants. The other is evaluative. Regarding the motivational approach, think of people as the strings of a piano. Each string has an ideal vibration where it performs best. Each and every person who participates in training—whether formal or informal, electronically delivered or classroom-based, soft skills or IT—is striving towards a personal best. A person's interpretation of his or her higher purpose is that person's vibration.

It's time-consuming and requires a lot of effort to uncover each participant's higher purpose, but think how much time, money, and effort are sunk into misguided incentive plans that backfire, never

work in the first place, or are ignored. That makes the assessment of a Level 5 motivator child's play—well, relatively speaking. The best managers, trainers, and colleagues already know the higher purpose for each of the people they work with and care about, so it's just a question of doing more up-front work to add stimuli that addresses those higher callings.

For each of my clients, I know at least one of their higher callings. One client is passionate about motor racing and helping underprivileged groups. Another, who almost became a nun, infuses every part of her life with spirituality. Another client allays his insecurities by striving to be viewed as a thought leader in his field. I learned their higher calling just by taking the time to listen and observe. That's much less costly than bringing in an expensive consulting firm to figure it out.

The other approach to Level 5 is evaluative and directly affects stakeholders and funders. And "higher calling" is still the best way to define this level. Level 5 answers this question: Has the person been able to serve something larger than herself or her organization and made the world a better place? She could have achieved her higher calling by learning information, taking training, retaining content, or whatever.

The value of Level 5 to stakeholders and funders comes from the perspective of evaluation. You can find clear cases of people agreeing on the validity of the particular higher purpose. For example, a biotech firm discovers a cure for a fatal disease. The accomplishment of the higher purpose is profitable and improves the firm's

reputation and employees' morale. The discovery of the cure is tied to learning that occurred in the firm.

Yet, the concept of "something bigger" is swampland. What to me seems like a valid higher purpose might appear futile, a waste of time, or offensive to you. Given the complexity of this issue, it's not surprising it hasn't informed our thoughts around training evaluation. It's hard enough to measure the items we can all agree on, such as did the class on presentation skills land you the new account which, in turn, added 10 percent to this year's revenue? Did the new e-learning simulation on business accounting help you discover the tax loophole that saved your company \$1.3 million last year? But how can you measure the effect of someone saving a stray cat's life or a company finding a way to make affordable clothing out of recycled soda cans?

In the global economy, it's a necessity, not an option, to ask how learning and training efforts can be measured at Level 5, how they're meeting a higher purpose. It's nice that on a Level 4 evaluation, we can increase shareholder value, make more sales, or produce more widgets. But we need to ask how our efforts will affect the world economy in 10 years, the people in China now, the environment in five years, the labor supply in 25 years? A smart career counselor named Wendy Zito-Zones once told me, "You can pay now or pay later. But if you pay later, you'll also be paying off the interest."

The need to do more than just improve one's company is critical, particularly when that company touches so many others around the world. Closing our eyes won't make that imperative go away; it will just hand the advantage to those willing to measure what is not easily measurable.

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