

Evaluation of Conceptual Training

A Step-by-Step Procedure

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Dr. Donald L. Kirkpatrick in a series of four articles written in the *Journal of the ASTD* (Nov. and Dec., 1959 and Jan. and Feb., 1960) entitled "Techniques for Evaluating Training Programs" elaborated on four steps of evaluation. The four steps are: *Reaction, Learning, Behavior and Results*.

Dr. Kirkpatrick defined each step which I will reiterate. Reaction evaluation is defined as a measurement of the participants' feelings toward the training program. Learning evaluation is defined as a measurement as to what principles and techniques were understood and absorbed by the participants. Behavior evaluation is defined as a measurement of the training pro-

gram effectiveness in terms of the on-the-job behavior. Results evaluation is defined as a measurement of results on-the-job directly or indirectly related to the training program.

A Problem

A problem that confronts many training directors is how to evaluate a training program that relates conceptual material to the participants. The reason it is a problem is because the current techniques are not adequate for the purpose. There are three factors that should be considered in evaluating a conceptual training program. They are: the *awareness* of the concepts by the participants, the *understanding* and the *commitment* to the

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concepts. These three factors do overlap the evaluation of learning behavior and results. I have developed a technique that has been successful for me in evaluating conceptual training programs.

The Technique

Most participants enter a training program with some type of "hidden agenda." By this I mean that the participants usually have some problem or question in the back of their mind concerning the material that is to be presented in relation to their background, frame of reference, job and experiences.

Therefore, at the start of a conceptual training program such as Supervision, Communication, I use the following procedure in an attempt to evaluate the course from the standpoint of awareness, understanding and commitment. These three factors overlap the learning, behavior and results evaluations as explained above. I am not too concerned with the reaction evaluation because there are many fine available techniques that are useful and meaningful.

Step 1 Within the first hour of the first day of a training program I ask each participant to list an anticipated actual problem that they foresee in the area related to the training program.¹ As soon as all the cards are collected my secretary edits and makes a listing of all the problems presented and copies are made for each participant. This is usually completed before lunch of the first day.

Step 2 Right after lunch each participant is presented with a copy of

the anticipated or actual problems that have been presented in morning sessions. It is gratifying to see the quality of problems presented. Occasionally, I will spot check the problems to verify them against the actual situations that exist in the work area. They are real problems in a majority of cases. I ask each participant to answer every problem keeping in mind their job and all of its ramifications plus the following questions: Who? - What? - When? - Where? - How? - and - Why? At this point, they identify their responses by name. Both problems and responses are collected at this time.

These responses give an indication of the awareness and understanding of the concepts in relationship to how they respond to the problems. These responses are studied in detail after the first session.

Step 3 Throughout the training program the problems are integrated either directly or indirectly when presenting the conceptual material. Likewise, each concept and problem plus additional problems are discussed by the participants.

Step 4 At the end of the training program a form is used to obtain the reactions of the participants. The participants are again asked to respond to the list of problems as they were in Step 2. This now gives more insight into each participant's awareness and understanding of the concepts in relationship to the problems and responses. At this point, the first and second responses are analyzed and compared.

1. The technique for this step is elaborated in an article written by me for the *Training Directors Journal*, entitled "The 3 x 5 Card: A Training Technique," Mar. 1964, Vol. 17, No. 5, p. 29.

Step 5 Three months after the training program, the participants are again asked to respond to the same problems. Three months is an arbitrary time period. So far it has proved successful. I cannot comment on any other date since no other time has been tried. Also, at this time the participants are asked to identify any of the listed problems they have experienced since the training program began. They are also requested to present any other problems in relationship to the concepts presented and how they actually handled them.

This step confirms the awareness and understanding. It also gives an indication of the commitment to the concepts in relationship to their jobs plus it gives an excellent evaluation of how the material presented is being used in relationship to the job.

By evaluating the awareness, understanding and commitment in this five-step technique, I also am obtaining an evaluation of learning, behavior and results.

Results

This technique has been used successfully several times. I could list the results but the results to anyone else may not be too meaningful. I, like Dr. Kirkpatrick, work under the assumption that one training director cannot borrow evaluation results from another. He can, however, borrow eval-

uation techniques. This is why the technique is stressed throughout this article rather than results.

Discussion

In any training program, the "hidden agenda" is an important construct that should be taken into consideration. It makes the program more significant because you deal with problems that are real to the participants.

Using this technique of evaluation results in more work for the training director but the end results from the standpoint of the benefits to the participants and the organization and from the standpoint of the evaluation can be readily seen. This evaluation technique gives an evaluation for each individual participant. This is important in assisting the participants on a follow-up basis.

A summary evaluation for the group could be obtained, but this is optional.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to look at a very important aspect of a training director's job, namely the evaluation of training programs that relate conceptual material to participants. This article attempts to inform others of a possible technique for evaluating conceptual training programs. It is important for training directors to exchange information on techniques and procedures of evaluation. This is the only way that progress can be made in the area of evaluation.

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