Evaluations That Short Change

Both articles on evaluation in the September *Journal* fell short of the real purpose for evaluating any training program: to find out if it meets the need. Both "High-Quality Evaluation," by Tyson and Birnbrauer, and "Evaluating Your Training Programs," by Komras, thoroughly discussed ways to evaluate participant reaction and the quality of design of a given program. Neither discussed two additional critical evaluation areas: use of learned skills on the job and the value of the program to the organization.

I agree with the authors that we need to evaluate participant reaction and program design. This information tells us how well we have met our target population's learning needs as well as the quality of our design. However, this data is of little value if the skills aren't used on the job, or, if used, have no positive impact on the overall mission of the organization.

HRD professionals need to look at a program in terms of results that have value to the organization, as well as the criteria specified by the above authors. There are many ways to get this information; none of them easy. Evaluation design needs to start with the initial needs analysis and be closely linked to the implementation system for the program. However, difficulty in obtaining data on program results makes it no less critical. If a program exists to fill a need, we should measure its success in terms of how well it meets that need. We owe that much to our clients or the organizations we support.

In today's business environment, staff functions need to be able to contribute to a company's bottom line. If we wish to be seen as performance improvement specialists instead of corporate school keepers, we need to measure the results of our efforts with a yardstick meaningful to management. Appropriate measurement can also help management see our function as a resource to improve organizational performance instead of a luxury to be used only when times are good. We can help by evaluating our training or performance improvement efforts in terms of bottom-line results.

John M. Swinney
Performance Engineer
Human Resource Development
Yellow Freight Systems

One-Too-Many Consultants?

I recently attended a seminar that relied on emotional appeal to put across what really was a hackneyed message: trainers should use high technology to train. Because the technology is out there, the argument went, we ought to buy into it. (It goes without saying that the presenter just happened to have a line of computer-training software available from his consulting company.)

Several members of the audience flocked to the attractive, ever-smiling and upbeat presenter afterwards to find out more about what he was selling and how it could fit into their training budgets. The presenter, of course, said nothing about the substance of his high-tech training package. Now, even if the most enthusiastic members of the audience had the money, how were they going to explain to their bosses the need for the software when they hadn't had it explained to them to begin with by the only person who knew? This kind of thing happens every day. And when it does—when trainers go to upper management with nothing more than their memory of a presenter's sales pitch—the credibility of those trainers and the profession takes a nosedive.

Like that presenter, I, too, am a consultant. But I have to wonder sometimes if there are too many of us around for the good of the rest of the trainers out there.

Maxwell Perck
Hackensack, N.J.

Instead of front-end analysis for training, why not try rear-end analysis? Ask experts to write down all they know about an area, have a training analyst monitor the word processing of the material, then call a conference to select those items which contribute most to understanding of the area. Be sure to include instructors as members of the conference. The conference will permit emergence of critical concepts in an area.

Judith Ann Menzer
Allen Corporation of America
San Diego

Write Right

Yvonne MacManus should be commended for giving good advice in her article "Unruly Writing" (August 1985). However, since she advises her readers to "Remember—you're not writing for English 101," perhaps she should have reviewed what she learned in English 101. For example:

■ A word's definition should agree in number: "gerund (words ending in 'ing)" should be *gerund (word)* or *gerunds (words)*.
■ Also, her definition is incorrect because all words ending in "ing" are not gerunds. A gerund functions as a noun; a present participle functions as a modifier. "Showing a loss of 13.5 percent in gross revenue, the 1985 board . . ." contains a participle, not a gerund.
■ *If* and *While* are subordinate conjunctions, not prepositions, in "If we continue" and "While none could disagree."

The impact of the article would have been stronger had the author just omitted the terminology.

Shirley Fencl
Augusta, Ga.

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