

The Four Moments of Truth™

ABSTRACT

Evidence shows that event-based training overwhelmingly fails to ensure the successful “transfer of learning” to on-the-job performance. This paper provides an analysis of a time-sensitive and sequential process trainees and next-level managers (NLMs) can employ that has been proven effective in sustaining training beyond traditional norms.

Driving Successful Sustainment Initiatives

Success in any business venture is most often a function of return on investment (ROI). Conversely, the prominent historical approach to measuring success in the training profession has featured attempts to quantify the feelings those being trained had about the experience itself, in combination with a pre-post assessment focused on content familiarity. We have come to refer to this widely accepted “one-two punch” in the learning community as Level I and II analyses. Thank you Donald Kirkpatrick!

But, as Kirkpatrick would be the first to point out, there is a big difference between liking and knowing something and being able to apply what you like and know to improve job performance (Level III and IV analyses). We identify that distinction as learning transfer, which we define as “the effective application of knowledge and skills gained by learners to jobs or other responsibilities.” Further, we recognize that learning transfer is most predictably a product of intentional, proactive and well-orchestrated efforts to sustain learning in the workplace.

In that regard, it has long been recognized that “event-based training” is limited when it comes to sustainment (i.e., the application of new information to the learner’s on-the-job performance). However, it is only within the last decade or so that studies have placed the “transfer success” of most event-based training at somewhere between 10 to 20 percent. Yes, that’s right. Only 10 to 20 percent of the information an employee accumulates during training actually gets applied to his or her job. Suffice to say this does not exactly reflect stellar ROI results.

Initial attempts to “move the needle” in the right direction understandably began with the training itself. Through these efforts, we’ve developed significant depth on the components that constitute effective adult education (i.e., the need to consider the diversity of learning types; the importance of communicating the “why” of the learning and engaging Learners throughout the experience; how and when to “blend”; etc.). Incorporating these findings into the design process succeeded in elevating test scores at the conclusion of training events; however, despite those improved test scores, the successful transfer from training to job performance continued to remain low.

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Further research by Kirkpatrick, Mary Broad, John Newstrom and others revealed that the critical success factors of training programs go beyond the program and the learner to include the workplace itself – most notably the learner’s next-level manager and his/her impact on learner engagement and learning transfer.

Level	Manager Support	Outcome
PREVENTING	Manager sees training as being in direct opposition to their style	Training does not transfer
DISCOURAGING	Manager sends negative message about the skills learned in training by modeling contradictory behaviors in the workplace	Training does not transfer
NEUTRAL	Manager ignores training and adopts business-as-usual attitude	Learner decides whether or not to implement training as manager neither objects nor supports it
ENCOURAGING	Manager encourages employee to put training into action by showing interest in what was learned	Training is likely to transfer
REQUIRING	Manager knows what was learned and insists on implementation – in some cases creating contracts to ensure implementation	Training will be implemented

Kirkpatrick D. Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers; 1998.

Kirkpatrick’s research identified five typical management responses that influenced the degree to which training transfers to the workplace.

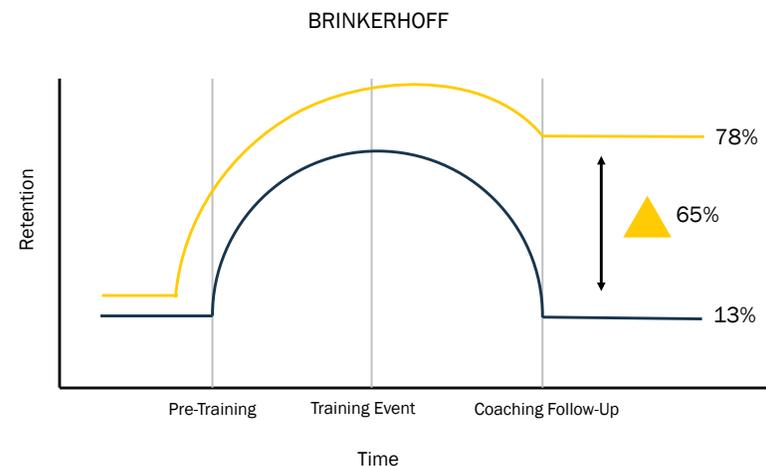
- » The first is **PREVENTING**. These managers are at odds with the training and see it as an imposition, or as not providing substantive value. (“I know what you learned in training, but we just don’t do it like that here.”) Through their direct opposition, verbally expressed or not, whatever was retained by the learner is rarely transferred
- » **DISCOURAGING** managers produce responses that are less negative than preventing managers but clearly fall short of active support. (“All that theory sounds good and looks great on paper, but good luck making it work out here in the real world.”) Predictably, a limited probability of meaningful transfer remains

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- » Busy managers often adopt a **NEUTRAL** response, which neither supports nor discourages transfer. (“Glad you enjoyed the experience; feel free to try out what you learned if you feel it will help you hit targets/meet goals.”) Transfer is effectively left up to learner discretion and “environmental reinforcement”
- » The **ENCOURAGING** manager speaks in a positive manner about the training both before and after the event itself. (“When I went through program X, it really helped me in the following ways ...”) Their learners are much more likely to retain what they experienced and implement what they retained
- » Finally, there are managers that are best described as **REQUIRING**. These managers have a working knowledge of the impact the training will have on productivity. They take responsibility for setting expectations for trainee participation as well as establishing specific steps trainees will take to implement what has been learned on the job. (“Ok, here are the objectives of the training you will be attending. I’d be interested in hearing how you feel this workshop can help you on the job, and I would like to have you understand my expectations for your participation. When you get back from training, I want to sit down with you to discuss ...”) The requiring manager makes good on their company’s investment in training by setting the stage for a positive ROI

Managing – The Difference

Recent studies that measure the level of sustainment when managers actively participated in the transfer process demonstrated extraordinary results. One in particular (conducted by Brinkerhoff and Apking) reported that retention and transfer to on-the-job application jumped to 78 percent with management involvement. That’s an impressive 65 percentage point improvement over transfer rates without manager involvement.



Brinkerhoff RO, Apking AM. High Impact Learning. Perseus; 2001.

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Somehow this seems easy – engage managers and your training will produce a desirable result. Clearly, if it were in fact that simple, the challenges associated with training transfer would be non-existent. The fact of the matter is without a clear process, mutual task alignment and accountability, manager commitment to the pull-through of training remains random, haphazard and difficult to measure.

To assist you in overcoming these potential challenges, The Center for Leadership Studies has created a simple four-step process that ensures NLMs support learners at critical moments in the learning cycle. We call this “The Four Moments of Truth™.” It isn’t rocket science. It isn’t brain surgery. By design, it isn’t anything other than an organized, common sense, course of action that (if followed) will almost invariably deliver a positive return on your training investment.



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Moment of Truth #1: Outline Pre-Training Expectation

It is difficult to imagine anyone rationally expecting to be able to win a game without knowing the rules or how to score. Yet, far too often, learners in all walks of life consume training with a limited true understanding of what is expected of them, how the training relates to their job or (more importantly) how the training can help them become better at their jobs.

If learners are clearly informed of the on-the-job-related expectations associated with an upcoming training experience, the probability for transfer increases greatly. If those expectations are facilitated/communicated by the immediate supervisor of the trainee, the probability of training transfer significantly increases.

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Outlining Success

Here's how that works. A week or two prior to the training event, "trainees" and their next-level managers receive separate but interrelated documents:

- » The information supplied to the NLM includes (but is not necessarily limited to) the following:
 - An overview of the training (one- to two-paragraph course summary)
 - Objectives for the training
 - Instructions/guidelines for the NLM to facilitate a pre-training, expectations setting discussion with the trainee:
 - Questions to ask
 - Examples of how the training can improve performance on the job
 - Suggestions/options for the NLM to prepare the trainee for training and proactively position a post-event discussion focused on implementing what has been learned
- » The information supplied to the trainee includes (but is not necessarily limited to):
 - An overview of the training
 - Objectives for the training
 - An overview of the discussion they are about to have with their NLM
 - Examples of how the training has been used by other trainees to improve performance (i.e., "What Good Looks Like" illustrations/stories intended to get the trainee thinking about transfer before their pre-training meeting with their NLM)

It has been our experience that NLMs can effectively prepare for the first moment of truth in 10-20 minutes (serious overachievers occasionally take longer). Trainees are asked to make a similar time commitment. The actual pre-training discussion is a function of a number of variables but usually can be conducted in 20-30 minutes. The outcomes of a successful pre-training exchange?

- » A motivated and prepared trainee
- » A NLM that is proactively preparing for his/her role to reinforce the transfer of the learning that is about to take place
- » A trainee and an NLM that have effectively achieved "same page status"

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Moment of Truth #2: During Training

During the event itself, the roles of the trainee and the NLM during training are as follows:

Trainee

1. Brings the completed Moment of Truth #1 document to training. The intent is to keep the mutually agreed-upon learning objectives “front of mind” throughout the training event.
2. Participates to the best of his/her ability.
3. Identifies something to start doing, stop doing, or do more of as a result of this event in preparation for the post-training discussion with the NLM (i.e., documents an intended behavior change, the impact they think that behavior change will have on performance/productivity, how that impact can be measured and what role they feel their manager should play in training transfer [i.e., provide direction; talk through options; empower; etc.]).

Next Level Manager

- Eliminates and/or minimizes interruptions to the trainee during Moment of Truth #2.

Moment of Truth #3: Coaching

One to two weeks after the training event, the NLM and trainee meet for a one-on-one coaching session. The objective of that session is threefold:

1. Determine how the trainee will implement what was learned.
2. Determine how the manager and the trainee will measure the impact of the trainee’s behavior change on performance/productivity.
3. Negotiate the role the manager will play in assisting the trainee during implementation (i.e. Direct/guide? Participate/collaborate? Empower/delegate?)

While the specific flow of this meeting will vary, it has been our experience that most of these discussions begin with a review of the expectations established in Moment of Truth #1, and are followed by the trainee providing:

- » An overview of the training event
- » An update on the implementation plan (“Here’s what I intend to do based on our pre-training discussion, and here’s the impact I see that behavior change having on my objectives/desired results ...”)

It strikes us (and probably you as well) as we document the details embedded in the third

moment of truth, that we aren't describing anything that is really out of the ordinary for good managers. Put in the context of the following performance management graphic, good managers routinely view the training of their direct reports as a built in opportunity to update expectations, provide ongoing feedback and accelerate the development of the individual in question.



The collaborative exchange between the NLM and the trainee in the first moment of truth focused on the objectives of an upcoming training event (and the relevance of those objectives to on-the-job performance) and how it served to get both parties “on the same page” as the training event approached. It stands to reason, then, if that exchange is executed properly, the trainee will listen carefully and readily engage during the training itself (Moment of Truth #2). After all, he/she will be preparing for a post-training transfer discussion with their NLM. To those points, the third moment of truth can, and should, be viewed as the natural, logical extension of the first two.

Moment of Truth #4: Continuous Coaching/Follow-Up

The same is true of the fourth moment of truth in that it is the logical extension of the first three. During Moment of Truth #4, which usually occurs two to three months after the training event, the NLM becomes actively engaged in ongoing, continuous coaching and follow-up. By that time, the trainee should have had an opportunity to implement the action plan developed in the third moment of truth and should come to the meeting prepared to talk about the results achieved and/or the challenges faced. Together, the trainee and the NLM should:

- » Discuss progress toward the learning goals
- » Update the action plan as needed
- » Determine if additional support is needed

At the end of the meeting, the NLM documents the discussion. He/she continues coaching, as needed, to reinforce the skills and their application to the trainee's ongoing development and job-related responsibilities. This is also a built-in opportunity for the NLM to recognize the trainee's success and assure him or her that the effort made was worth it by pointing out tangible benefits/results.

Conclusion

Occasionally, we are confronted by what we perceive as well-intended push back when we present The Four Moments of Truth™ as a workable sustainment process. The obstacle most often encountered is “our managers don’t have that kind of time.” And, in a world where managers are routinely asked to “do more with less,” at face value, there may be some justification for that knee-jerk reaction.

On the flip side of that coin, we would propose that if the training under consideration does not provide a level of value that demands an encouraging or requiring NLM, remove it from your curriculum. From our vantage point, few organizations in this day and age can justify the luxury associated with producing an event that isn’t tied in some way to a change in behavior that produces a meaningful result.

What are the implications of this trend? There are many of course – but none more important than how training is marketed within the organization. Traditionally, the benefits of training events were positioned with trainees by those conducting the training (i.e., “learn this ... use it on your job ... experience success”). Kirkpatrick, Broad, Newstrom and others would suggest the benefits of the training process should be positioned with and influenced by NLMs (i.e., “with your active support ... here is how this training can accelerate the development of those you are counting on to do more with less”). And, from our perspective, it’s not that these NLMs don’t have the time to effectively execute The Four Moments of Truth™, it’s simply that they haven’t experienced the benefits of making it a priority.

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