

BUILDING LEADERS

DESIGNING TRAINING FOR BEHAVIOR CHANGE IS LIKE FINE DINING



There are some things that the term “dinner” has in common with the term “fine dining” ... but for most of us, those words conjure up drastically different imagery.

“Dinner” is a comparatively informal event. Many of us make daily decisions about dinner in the moment and on the fly. Are we eating out? Driving through? Throwing something on the grill or in the oven? Whatever the decision turns out to be, we usually engage with modest expectations, and when it is over, we move on.

DESIGNING FOR BEHAVIOR CHANGE REQUIRES EXPANSIVE FORETHOUGHT.

“Fine dining” is a different deal altogether. We channel our inner food critic and scrutinize every aspect of the food and service. If our expectations are met (or exceeded) there is usually immediate, discernible evidence on display. We provide feedback to the proprietors of the restaurant, and we provide passionate, word-of-mouth testimonials to others.

To us, the difference between delivering training and designing training for behavior change is akin to the differences between preparing dinner and experiencing fine dining. And the essence of that difference is a function of the planning that drives expectations that eventually produces evidence.

PLANNING

Designing for behavior change requires expansive forethought. The training experience itself must be both engaging and relevant (nothing has changed there). Put another way, the probability of transfer decreases exponentially if the learning isn’t provocative, inspirational and instructive.

Beyond that, serious consideration needs to be given to an extended cadre of stakeholders. Who will drive the implementation of new skills on the job? (Primarily the direct supervisor/manager of the trainee.) Who will be able to provide an objective assessment of the behavior change as well as the impact that change has produced? (If effectively assessed, the trainee.)

EXPECTATIONS

You can learn a lot by how someone introduces themselves in a training session. Consider two hypotheticals in that regard:

- “Just glad to be here and looking forward to learning something that might help me become more effective.” (Dinner!)
- “I’m a recently promoted manager, and I’m attending this event for the express purpose of increasing my effectiveness with the tenured members of my team. We have a critical launch taking place at the end of this quarter, and it will not be successful without very high levels of transparency and trust. I need to accelerate my ability to build that with them.” (Fine Dining!)

When learners initiate with clear intent, there is a high probability they have met with their manager prior to training and aligned on not only what they are there to learn but why they are there to learn it.

EVIDENCE

It has long been a challenging undertaking to directly correlate a learning experience with a productivity outcome. So many variables litter the path of causality.

On the other hand, it is comparatively straightforward to determine if a learning experience has resulted in a meaningful behavior change. We recommend checking out “The Success Case Method” by Robert Brinkerhoff. In essence, practitioners who can recount specifics six months or more after a meaningful learning experience can do so because they have been applying what they learned over time (application drives retention).

In the spirit of our analogy, it is the difference between hearing a recommendation from someone who has never stepped foot in a restaurant compared to someone who has eaten there every two weeks for the past three years. ☺

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