



STICKY LEARNING MADE EASY

With all due respect to the multitudes of people who have made high-quality contributions to the field of training evaluation over the years, when we think about “making learning stick,” four names leap to the front of our minds:

KIRKPATRICK

Donald Kirkpatrick authored a doctoral dissertation in the late 1950s that went on to become universally known as “[The Kirkpatrick Model](#)” (if you are reading this column ... there is a strong probability that you are quite familiar with that framework). The next generation of Kirkpatricks (Jim and Wendy) modernized the original work without altering its foundational and common-sense appeal.

In brief review, the impact of training can be measured based on the reaction of the learners to the experience, the learning that took place, how much behavior change occurred because of the training; and the bearing that behavior change had on results.

BROAD AND NEWSTROM

As universally familiar as it was, there was an undeniable challenge with the way training organizations implemented The Kirkpatrick Model. They only used 25% of it! Almost everyone measured Level 1 (reaction), but precious few measured anything else.

Mary Broad and John Newstrom addressed this challenge in the late 1980s with their classic book, “Transfer of Training.” They discovered beyond reasonable doubt that making learning stick had far less to do with the successful delivery of training ... and almost everything to do with the next-level manager (NLM). The NLM is

the direct supervisor of the individual being trained.

STICKY TRAINING HAS ITS ROOTS OUTSIDE OF THE TRAINING DEPARTMENT

BRINKERHOFF

In the early 2000s, Robert Brinkerhoff both confirmed and accentuated the contributions of the Kirkpatricks and Broad and Newstrom. He developed a research practice referred to as The Success Case Method, and his emphasis was almost exclusively on Level 3 (behavior change) and Level 4 (results). In so doing, he established that Broad and Newstrom were well ahead of their time! The NLM is indeed the key driver of sticky learning and has the power to enhance retention and application of learning by up to 65%.

MAKING LEARNING STICK

With those as our frames of reference, we are convinced that making learning stick is a function of the advocacy and sponsorship NLMs provide for trainees. What does that translate to? Consider these three, sequential steps:

1. Meet Before: The NLM needs to set an expectation with the trainee that learning is an investment by the organization in the trainee’s career. This “primer” should be brief (~15 minutes) and serve to get the trainee proactively thinking about what they need to learn, and how that learning has the potential to enhance their contribution and performance. The NLM also needs to ensure

the trainee understands they will meet again (soon after the learning experience) to discuss specifics surrounding implementation.

- 2. Treat Learning Like It Matters:** The NLM needs to communicate to the team/department that work problems will not be the responsibility of those in training. Teammates and peers need to both understand and respect the trainee’s immersion in training and refrain from contacting them regarding emergent challenges.
- 3. Meet After:** Ideally within a week after training has been completed, the NLM sets another touchpoint with the trainee. This exchange is critical to the transfer process! The trainee shares what they learned and how they will approach implementation. The NLM clarifies as needed, ensures the trainee has a workable plan and commits to supporting that plan by providing feedback and discussion opportunities moving forward.

We would offer in conclusion that sticky training has its roots outside of the training department. The learning event must be good (Levels 1 and 2 matter!). But sticky learning is a function of what goes on before and after the event and between stakeholders ... who have jobs to do! 🙌

Marshall Goldsmith is the world authority in helping successful leaders get even better. Sam Shriver is the executive vice president at The Center for Leadership Studies. [Email Marshall and Sam.](#)