

Training Isn't What Motivates Employees to Change

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If you think about where organizational learning budgets and resources are allocated, the area that generally comes to mind is training. The design, development, and delivery of training receives much of a learning organization's attention. Yet there are two other areas that have just as much of an impact on the effectiveness of organizational learning – what happens before a training program and what happens after.

Activities prior to a training event determine how eager and ready participants are for learning. The participant selection process, training-invitation communications, and pre-training assignments establish the mindset and readiness a participant brings to a training event. People come to training events ranging from well prepared and eager to learn to averse and unready.

Activities following a training event determine how well participants apply and retain their learning. Post-training coaching, follow up, progress tracking, testing, and use of consequences determine how well participants convert their learning into sustainable results. People's retention varies between very little to most everything depending on what they do following a training event. Training can be either a complete waste of time and money or a significant contributor to an organization's desired results.

What do you think has the most influence on learners' ability to turn their learning into sustainable behavioral results – what happens before, during, or after a training event? Of these three options, what is most important to allocate budget and resources to: Option 1 - pre-training activities that develop the participants mindset and readiness prior to the event? Option 2 – training activities that ensure the quality of the content and delivery of the training program? Or option 3 - post-training activities that provide opportunities for application and retention after training?



Clearly all three areas are critical to achieving sustained learning and change, but if forced to choose which is most important, I would choose “pre-training”. Learning and behavioral change starts here. If participants don't bring an eager and positive mindset to their training, they won't give their full attention to it. They won't be engaged. They won't learn what they need to learn, much less apply and retain it. If they haven't completed their prerequisites and understand the basics, they will start the training on their heels like an under-powered boxer at the start of a match. They will lack understanding and confidence. They will be frustrated and behind.



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Developing the right mindset not only applies to training, but keeping up with change and learning in general. Having a mindset that is eager to learn enables a lifetime of continuous improvement. It facilitates innovation, self-improvement, business improvement, and helping others in their improvement. It applies to keeping up with advances in technology, implementing new methods, and embracing new behaviors. Having the right mindset fundamentally determines what people do and the results they achieve. Will precedes skill. Attitude precedes aptitude. Mindset precedes ability. There is no place that having the right mindset is more important than in learning and changing behavior.

Here are ten principles to follow in motivating people to become eager to learn and keep up with the ever increasing pace of change:

1. Create and communicate a compelling vision of a better future.
2. Describe in detail the problems to be solved and/or the opportunities to be leveraged. Highlight the gap between what is and what could be.
3. State the magnitude of the positive impact of solving the problems and leveraging the opportunities. Point out the negative impact of not solving the problems or leveraging the opportunities.
4. Personalize the current and potential future circumstances. Let people know what is in it for them. Make people aware of what the better future means to them and how it impacts their individual desires and goals.
5. Position the need to change, the opportunity to learn, the new knowledge to be gained, the improved skills to be developed, and the new behaviors to be used as critical to solving the problems and leveraging the opportunities ahead.
6. Make the better future believable. Provide case studies and testimonials. Bring in speakers to provide examples of successes. Highlight the progress already made by others.
7. Provide incentives. Create financial and non-financial rewards. Relate how future career opportunities, raises, and promotions are impacted by adoption of the desired changes and behaviors to be developed.
8. Create a sense of urgency. Put deadlines in place. Communicate a plan that clearly shows when old systems, methods, attitudes, and skills will be disadvantageous if not withdrawn.
9. Emphasize the consequences. Stress the rewards ahead for those who learn and do what they should. Mention the difficulties ahead for those who don't.
10. Establish metrics that track pre-training, training, and post-training activities. Let people know they will be held accountable.

Perform these pre-training activities and enjoy the success that comes with having motivated people who want to learn, change, and perform to their peak potential.

Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* (www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com), author of the *SCOPE of Leadership* six-book series on coaching leaders to lead as coaches (www.ScopeOfLeadership.com), and president of Alpine Link Corp (www.AlpineLink.com), a boutique consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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