

# The Answer is Accountability

*It is not how much money you invest in training that makes a good training program, it is the strategy of implementation that delivers the return on your investment.*

By Frank Sarr

It is commonly believed that to be a highly effective person, you must begin a project with the end in mind. It is safe to assume that you should begin with the end in mind to create a highly effective training program as well. The problem is that this is not where many companies begin. As a result, programs are introduced and quickly disappear, materials are developed and are not used, eLearning replaces classroom training, webinars are conducted on a weekly basis, the training staff is expanded yet nothing changes. All because an important step is not taken, namely, developing a vision of the overall training implementation strategy.

## Training Implementation Strategy

The impact of today's economy on training budgets creates an opportunity for organizations to take time out to step back and define the training implementation strategy. Here you determine the:

- Phases of your training
- Competencies you want your trainees to possess at the end of each phase
- Characteristics of the audiences who are participating in the training.

This is not as monumental of a task as it sounds, but it is critical because it sets the stage for decisions as to:

- Appropriate methods for the delivery of the training
- What resources are needed and in what form they are needed - paper based, interactive media, etc.
- Whether to build or buy the required resources
- Whether internal or external resources will be used based on the needed expertise
- What needs to be spent to get the desired training results.

The pressure to do something quickly leads to responses which produce little change, leave trainees hungry for training, and leave supervisors concerned about how poorly trained their people are. Ironically, when the expenditures are added up, they do amount to a very significant investment even with these results. "Ready, Fire, Aim!" has never proven to be a winning strategy. There is an opportunity to avoid building on existing "baggage" by investing a rather small amount of time to develop a training implementation strategy.

## Which Comes First - The Resources Or The Implementation Strategy?

If you know what you are looking for, the organization that feels it has few resources in the form of training materials/resources will be surprised at the amount of resources that it actually has. But you can only reach this point when you have put the effort into establishing your training implementation strategy. The strategy determines who needs to be trained, what you want to teach, when you want to teach it, why you want to deliver the material at this point, and how it will be delivered. Many companies already have excellent presentation and selling skills, customer service, and telemarketing programs available but first you have to determine what you are looking for and then determine if what you have is still able to meet your needs. The one that

is correct for you will determine by your implementation strategy and the philosophy that is driving that strategy. In addition, having a strategy positions you to negotiate what you really need as opposed to what comes with a given program if you need to go outside to fill gaps in your resources.

## **Accountability**

In his book “Working Without A Net,” Morris R. Schechtman pinpointed the answer to why training results are not what they should be when he wrote: “As much as we may like to think that accountability exists in our marketplace, we usually have nothing of the kind. Organizations give the concept lip service, but they do not hold anyone truly accountable.”

No matter how good the training materials and other resources, a lack of accountability results in numerous critiques from trainers and trainees: there was no consistency, it lacked structure, it took too much time, there was so much material to wade through and there were too many more important things that had to get done, and on and on. With the existence of accountability, these critiques are dramatically reduced because you can identify which critiques are legitimate and which ones are smoke screens to justify why the desired results were not achieved.

## **Existence of Accountability**

When there is accountability for the training results, management can answer the following questions with very little hesitation:

- Was the trainee trained?
- Was the “trainer” involved in the training?
- Was local management aware of the quality of training being given?
- Was regional management aware of the quality of the training being delivered?

## **A Performance System**

If you are going to hold someone accountable for a result, there must be a defined, measurable result that you are going to hold them accountable to achieve. In training, there needs to be a process in place that establishes the measureables and the steps required to achieve them. Built properly, this process becomes a performance system that all parties directly or indirectly involved in the training have the opportunity to facilitate, monitor, reinforce and obtain a clear understanding of what is actually happening. In other words, they are able to answer the questions listed above. In addition, they are able to continuously improve upon what is being accomplished and set a course of action towards solving core problems, rather than addressing the “feel good” responses that leave an empty feeling of “if it was so good why haven’t our results improved?”

Integrated with the implementation strategy, the performance system provides the basis for accountability because it:

1. Positions individuals to be accountable because only individuals can in fact be held accountable.
2. Clarifies areas in which one will be held accountable.
3. Sets expectations in a specific and clearly differentiating manner.
4. Delineates how the expectations will be measured both in quantity, quality and time frame.

5. Empowers the trainee and trainer to achieve the desired results and visibly places the success for the training result in their hands.

## **The Irony**

The irony is that the solution to your problem, namely, establishing accountability, does not cost any money, and surprisingly does not have to involve a lot of time on the part of the “owner.” Yet, like Morris Schechtman points out it does not exist. In addition, the “vision with the end in mind” does not have to take an inordinate amount of time either, but it is rarely done. The expensive part is that wrong materials were purchased, maximum benefits from the purchased and/or building of these resources were not achieved and the ability to utilize them with their appropriate audiences throughout their growth phases within your organization is not realized.

## **The Bottom Line**

It takes a lot of discipline to implement an effective training program - beginning with the (1) Implementation Strategy, (2) Establishing Accountability and (3) Installing a Performance System. But for organizations that want to maximize productivity of their people, have a positive impact on profitability and deal with the budgetary constraints that exist today, the R.O.I will come from:

- Accelerating the productivity of top performers – they are top performers because they can get there in spite of the training. However, giving them the structure and tools to become peak performers faster will impact your R.O.I.
- Early identification of poor performers – this brings the greatest return on investment. Bradford D. Smart, Ph.D in his book, “Top Grading” spells out the cost of a mis-hire. The sooner a mis-hire is identified, the better it is for the individual, the company and the R.O.I.
- Get existing and new resources used – *“The real genius is not in building the materials, it is in getting it used.”* In today’s eLearning and webinar culture, one has to rethink the importance of forced engagement and be aware of growing numbness to webinars. The novelty of eLearning from a learner perspective could result in diminished enthusiasm and motivation which means methods of forced engagement may be needed to reengage the learner. Webinars are being used so frequently that they have become a source of information not learning and the learner is getting distracted from the webinar itself and focused on other activities that can be performed while participating in the webinar. What has this got to do with R.O.I.? It represents time, money and other related costs that are not achieving the desired result.

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