

# Top Ten Tips for People Who Are Given Responsibility for Learning and Development

## 1. Decide what you want your training to do

Ask yourself 'what difference must this training make to my business?'

- What is the problem you want the training to solve?
- What changes might you expect to notice after the training?
- How would you describe a successful outcome?

It's really important to understand what your goal is before deciding what the training should look like.

## 2. Good training has SMART learning objectives

When selecting a course, check the course outline for the learning objectives. Compare the objectives with what you want the training to achieve (see above). If there are no objectives, ask for them! SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-related.

Objectives are especially important for major training projects, or when you are commissioning bespoke (custom-written) training. Well-written objectives help everyone to understand what the outcomes should be - they will keep the trainers on track and also help to set realistic delegate expectations.

## 3. Good training is engaging and relevant

Apart from objectives, look for the way the training is going to be delivered:

- 'Engaged' means the learners are actively doing, thinking or speaking – not sat down listening or watching for too long. Look for exercises, group work, role-plays, project work, etc.
- Training content should be relevant to their workplace – as much as possible re-creating real-life situations which the delegates face.

This may not always be the fastest way to learn, but it does tend to be more effective.

## 4. Don't just focus on the course

When arranging training, there is a natural tendency to focus on getting the training course right. Just as important is what happens before and after:

- Make sure the right people are going on the training. Make sure they are prepared for the training: some pre-course work may be necessary for them to get the most out of it; a pre-course discussion about learning objectives with their line manager is also good practice.
- There needs to be follow-up after the training, to make sure learners use what they have learned (even if it was the best course in the world, if they don't use what they learned you've wasted your money!).

## 5. Think about technology

Classroom training is an excellent way of delivering training, but it can be costly and inflexible. Technology can be used as an alternative, delivering learning using e-learning, webinars, wikis, etc. Even bespoke (custom-written) content might not be as expensive as you think, particularly if it significantly reduces delegate travel and accommodation costs.

## 6. Involve line managers

Line managers play a critical role in making sure that learners get the chance to use what they learn on training courses. Involve line managers in the selection of training for their staff. Encourage line managers to discuss with learners before and after the training, so they can be given useful opportunities to apply their new-found skills and knowledge. Encourage line managers to work as coaches – make staff development part of their job role.

## 7. Keep training records

Keep a central record of who's done what training, when, and how much it cost. It's an important measure of the investment your business is making in its people, and a useful step if you hope to gain IIP (Investors in People) status.

## 8. Evaluate your training

It is good practice to get feedback on training events, to understand what worked well and what didn't. If you can analyse this information (you'll probably need some kind of database), it will be really useful when planning future training activity. Of special value is any information that demonstrates the impact training has had on your business (this might be increased sales, reduced staff attrition, improved customer service indicators, a personal 'good news' story – whatever you can find). If you can't do this systematically, at least keep your eyes open for any indications that you might spot in your daily routine.

## 9. Training is more than just courses

Courses are important, but there are lots of things people can do to improve their skills which are not training courses, and most of them are cheaper! Reading books and trade journals, following specialist web communities, job secondments and good old on-the-job-training are all part of the mix. These are not so closely organised and you need to beware people aren't picking up bad habits, but this 'informal learning' can be very powerful.

## 10. And finally - training can't fix everything!

The point of training and learning is to make your organisation more successful, but there are lots of things that affect that: pay and incentives; management style; job processes and procedures; even the external economic climate and legal changes. Training might well be a significant part of solving a business problem, but don't assume it will solve everything single-handed. Regard training as just one way of changing things for the better.

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