



MAKING THE TRAINING STICK

TERMINATING TEFLON TRAINING TENDENCY



Too often investment in business learning is wasted. You organise a training event and the 'happy sheets' (those cheery feedback forms delegates complete at the end of every course) tell you that your delegates found the training useful, informative and who knows – maybe even inspiring!

That's all great until said delegates then return to their desks, get on with their real jobs and promptly forget whatever knowledge transfer took place. Sound familiar? That's because in reality, no knowledge transfer took place at all.

Think 'self-paced e-learning' works better? Well, think again. It's only attractive because it appears to be a cheaper (often it isn't), quicker and more convenient

option. But just ask yourself, did what we called 'distance learning' work any better than the training room in the past?

I don't think so. And all that's changed with e-learning is that it's slicker, more instant and easier to deliver.

I like to call all of this 'Teflon Training' – because none of it sticks.

So do we just have to accept that 'Teflon' effect?

I don't think so. I think the secret to successful knowledge transfer comes from three key ingredients: Relevance, Reinforcement and Stakeholder Commitment.

So let's delve into those a little further.



Relevance

Relevance is key to eliminating the dreaded Teflon Training Tendency.

Relevance can double, triple, perhaps even quadruple the effectiveness of your learning investment, even in a simple two-day training room intervention.

You see, the real challenge with most learning and development courses is their relevance to the delegates and to the organisation's situation. Case study-based workshops makes pretty hefty demands of any participant. Think about it. Having listened to the facilitator, and then applied the learning to, say, 'Enzyme Inc', they then have to do some mental gymnastics in an attempt to make the learning fit their

own areas of responsibility and work programmes. Truth be told, too often that's just too challenging.

So about 15 years ago, I gave up on case study-based workshops and came up with the idea of Action Learning Projects. And whilst this involves a lot more work on my part – and therefore a bit more time and financial investment on the part of the contracting organisation – 'oh boy' does it work.

So what is Action Learning Project-based training? Put simply, each delegate works in a team with two to six colleagues on a live project drawn from their own work programme.



Over the last 15 years working in marketing, product management, product development and strategic sales training, I've had participants develop marketing strategies and plans for their business units; bring their own new products to launch; review and re-balance their product portfolios; develop strategic account management and development plans for their key accounts; work up new business pitches for large new prospective customer opportunities; and analyse and calculate the strategy of their key competitors, as well as devise their own competitive strategies and plans. In that last case, the result from the Action Learning Projects of one L&D programme was a successful \$12bn dollar bid for a competitor organisation (not to boast or anything!).

Action Learning Projects work – and the reason they work so well is because they make the learning practical, pragmatic, real and relevant to each participant. They get to see how the concepts, tools

and processes can be applied to their own work situation and their own business needs, rather than those of a made-up case study.

They get to do real work in the training room itself (so it's no longer an interruption to their daily workflow) and they get coaching help and input from the trainer on their initial application of the skills and learning – both in relation to their correct use and in relation to their actual output.

This latter point means that the training moves from a mere simple pedagogical process, to genuine consultancy, with the trainer actually critiquing the work itself.



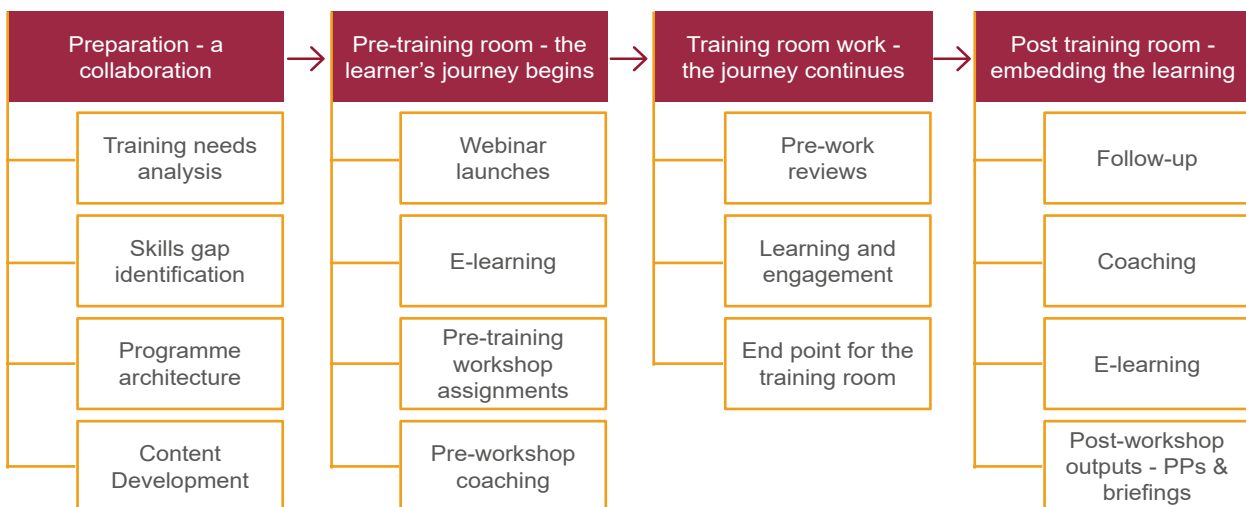
Reinforcement

This is an ingredient already offered from the best providers, and yet – due to the expense – most HR departments decide not to capitalise on it. Why? When we all know that a blended learning approach that includes coaching (before and after the workshop), e-learning, webinars, training room work and management mentoring will have a far greater impact than any of

those components in isolation.

The trouble is, it demands a financial and an organisational commitment far greater than a regular in-house two-day course will cost. So this means that you and your organisation have to be committed to the idea of real learning transfer, skills implementation and subsequent behavioural change. And you guessed it – you have to invest the resources to make that happen.

A fully blended and reinforced approach looks like this:



But even a smaller additional investment in some of these ingredients can have a positive impact. For example, you can blend a simple pre-workshop webinar with some post-workshop coaching – and that alone can have a positive impact.



Stakeholder Commitment

As noted, the reinforcement involves stakeholder commitment in relation to financial resources expended. In other words, you need to invest in the training to eliminate the Teflon effect.

But stakeholder commitment goes way beyond merely putting up the cash. It means getting internal sponsorship for the learning and getting those sponsors involved at each of the key points of the development and delivery, as well as in any post-workshop actions.

So you need a clear and visible operational owner of the learning and development (not just someone from HR), and that needs to be someone senior enough to ensure that the delegates realise the importance of it to the business and to them as a result. You might get the sponsors to send a kick-off email, or to produce a short video explaining why this is important work. You should certainly ensure that the sponsors' direct reports know they commissioned this learning and

development, what they see as the key outcomes and make it clear that they have invested in its relevance.

In addition to this point, this senior sponsor or these sponsors need to be involved in the development process too – reviewing the proposed content, delegate participation elements, and hand-out materials. They need to know exactly what skills, tools, techniques and processes are being communicated to the delegates in the training room and have comprehensively endorsed them.

And finally, in relation to stakeholder commitment there's the Godparent Principle. This is where you have a clear and visible stakeholder presence in the training room, either throughout or periodically. This ensures that the delegates know that this learning and development programme is not only fully approved and endorsed by their senior managers and is fully contextualised, but it enables the senior manager to deal with issues, challenges and even push back as they occur. You get rid of the facilitator parking lot issues sheet, because the god parent in the training room deals with issues as they arise.



So let's eliminate Teflon Training and use relevance, reinforcement and stakeholder commitment instead to get the right ROI on your learning and development for your organisation – simple!



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