HOW DO WE MAKE TRAINING STICK?

by Tai Munro, Ph.D

I took a class in botany when I was in university. Today I remember exactly one thing from it, I'm allergic to mould, which happened to be what my final project was on. We all have those courses, the ones we took because we had to, or because we needed more credits.

You don't want your organizational training to fall into the same trap. You need learners to remember and integrate the training they just took into their job performance. Otherwise, when you evaluate your course, it is pretty hard to prove why it should continue to receive budget or why you need money to build the next course.

There are strategies that we use when writing eLearning courses, such as creating scenarios based directly on what happens in the job, and encouraging learners to think about what they are learning and how it integrates with their previous knowledge. Even how we write learning objectives can affect whether the learner focuses on the end of the course, or their time on the job.

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There are also strategies that you can use when those learners are on the job to help them truly integrate their learning and realize the target behavioural and performance outcomes.

You are not alone if your first thought is, but I don't have any

more money: the training has to stand alone. And you are correct that some methods of follow up need a budget all their own, with a dedicated staff person. But there are ways to encourage on-the-job performance that don't require additional budget, particularly if you include them in your plans from the beginning.

Job aids are tools that provide specific guidance for completing specific tasks. They may be checklists, decision aids, procedure manuals, or tips sheets. You may already have these; in fact your training program may have used them as source content. If not, some, like checklists and tips sheets, can be created with the eLearning because they are covering the same material. Some learners will likely create these job aids themselves; if so, encourage them to share them with colleagues.

Reminders are just that, reminders to your staff of something they learned in the training. Perhaps you include a reminder about one skill or behaviour in your monthly newsletter. It could be as simple as a screen capture of one frame from the eLearning or a trivia question. Maybe you have a staff member with a passion for crossword puzzles who creates a monthly challenge. Perhaps you can find a staff member who could create simple cartoons that show one of the tasks from the training. Not only would this help to remind learners, you may also discover some hidden passions of your staff that can contribute to morale.

Mentoring involves matching learners up with someone, typically not in the same department, to teach or reinforce the new skills or knowledge. Traditionally this has been an individual who is in a more senior position but it doesn't have to be. Depending on the behaviour you are trying to affect you may find that your newest (and likely youngest) employees are actually the leaders. Why not have them mentor a senior executive on the procedure? You never know what friendships will be forged and what innovative ideas may develop.

Key performance indicators (KPIs) need to be directly related to the training. Make sure that you update you employee evaluation forms to reflect the desired behaviours and then work with supervisors so they understand what that means. The last thing you want is to develop a great training program that engages staff and motivates them to improve their performance, only to discover that the supervisors or the organization are creating barriers that the employees can't overcome.

There are, of course, other strategies that you can use to help integrate learning into on-the-job performance. The last thing you want is what so many students do in school, remember the information for the test and forget it the moment they walk out of the room for the last time.

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