

Post training *support*

Training is a big part of the business for the beauty industry - all companies do it, particularly for their Beauty Consultants working on counter. But are you backing up your training with sustained support and encouragement after the training session, to help those key members of your team really get to grips with the new product knowledge, new selling skills and customer service, and to break bad old habits and learn new good techniques? Dr. Rob Anderson provides us with a lesson on learning.

By **Dr. Rob Anderson**

Poor learning transfer from the classroom to the workplace can have serious consequences. For the company there is the financial impact of a low return on investment; for the L&D team there can be a loss of credibility and for the learners there is often minimal or inconsistent adoption of new skills, tools, processes, as well as limited shift towards desired behaviours.

From personal experience of working with many organisations on sales performance improvement projects, where the core initiative is training, it is important to not only focus effort and budget on ensuring that the training event is successful, but also ensuring that preceding the training there is a "Set Up for Success Phase" and, most critical of all, that there is a disciplined and planned "Implementation Phase" following - in other words post-training support to make the learning stick.

There are many potential barriers and drivers of successful learning transfer and these should be identified in the Set Up for Success Phase. In sales improvement projects I have identified around 30 commonly-cited factors which can have some impact on whether learning transfer is successful or not. The importance of these factors varies from one organisation to another but themes which are commonly more important include: leadership, reinforcement, coaching and measurement.

In order to highlight the importance of post-training implementation, in my work I use two metaphors:
"Learning without doing is like ploughing without sowing." Anon

"Implementing learning is like riding a bicycle. Unless you keep peddling, it won't go anywhere." Rob Anderson

So what initiatives can you take to improve the success of learning transfer to the workplace? In my previous article in Esprit Magazine (January 2009) - "Maximising the ROI of L&D Initiative in Tough Times" I described the benefits of Snack Learning™. This is a technology-driven approach to reinforcement and coaching

where learners are repeatedly encouraged to re-visit specific bite-sized learning snacks related to their training course and to use them day-to-day. Learning snacks are delivered to people via SMS links to their mobile phone, by email and via the Internet for several weeks after training events. Feedback from learners shows that this approach encourages them to use their new learning in their work. With regard to Esprit Magazine's theme of celebration, below are some examples of where I have seen celebration have a substantial impact on encouraging people to apply new learning in their work.

Capturing, Sharing and Celebrating Success Stories

There are many valuable benefits of capturing, sharing and celebrating success stories. They can help other people to learn more; encourage slow adopters; uncover factors which contribute to producing successful results, thereby defining best-practices; help to lift performance and define return on investment. Also, they can be highly motivational.

While managing a global sales process implementation project spanning 30+ countries and 800 sales professionals we captured the best success stories, published them on a quarterly basis and showcased them to the entire global sales organisation. (Ref. 1) In a number of other projects, respected sales people and opinion leaders have presented their success stories at sales conferences. These initiatives have been valuable in encouraging the adoption of new sales processes. Link the submission of success stories to a reward and recognition program and you have a powerful mechanism to drive learning.

Management Reward and Recognition

Reward and recognition programs can be low-cost and influential drivers of desired behaviour change following training events. Recognition can simply be movie or theatre tickets, dinner for two, or publishing a person's photo in an internal newsletter with acknowledgement for their performance. Public

recognition of sales team members by high profile leaders in the organisation can be very beneficial also. In one organisation we invited a respected senior executive to sign letters of commendation to sales professionals who had enthusiastically applied new selling tools as early adopters. The letters were publicly presented at a sales conference. The message was strong - this organisation places high value on these new sales tools and respects those who use them well. This encouraged other people to use the new tools.

Peer Recognition & Celebration

In a fast-growing consulting firm we launched a culture change and training program to encourage customer-oriented behaviour. Amongst many other initiatives, a large white board was hung on the wall in the high-traffic foyer. Everyone was encouraged to write a comment on this "Good News Board" about a colleague when they saw them display outstanding customer service. Initially there was scepticism as to whether this would encourage learning transfer about service behaviour, but within one week the board was full. Every week it was full! These peer salutations provided input to our "Three-Point Award" (a basketball term for a shot from outside the circle) for employee of the month. (Ref 2)

Celebrating Sales Wins/Loss Reviews

Successful sales results are often celebrated. Some organisations ring a bell to acknowledge that winning sales is highly valued. Successful end of quarter or sales cycle parties are commonplace. In sales meetings effective sales managers recognise successful sales people for displaying desired selling behaviours. As a side note, while sales won are celebrated, major sales lost are sometimes reviewed to highlight the factors which caused the loss. However, it can be equally valuable to review the factors which contributed to winning. Knowing the sales behaviours which lead to winning and the sales behaviours which are missing when you lose is important in focusing coaching and for performance management.

In summary, to ensure successful transfer of learning from the classroom to the workplace - making certain that your sales people understand the required product knowledge and/or new selling skills and that they use them competently in their day-to-day work - the training event must be followed by sustained, action-oriented implementation initiatives over the medium to long-term.

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Ref 1: www.metriss.com.au/agility

Ref 2: Customer Service Excellence, Beaumont Publishing, 1998, Whitford B., pp 216 - 229.

