

A hand is shown at the top of the page, with the index and middle fingers pointing downwards. Below the hand is a clear glass piggy bank with a coin slot on its back. The piggy bank is the central focus of the image, and the text is overlaid on it.

LEARNING EYE TO EYE:

ALIGNING TRAINING TO BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

By Elaine Biech

Workplace learning and performance professionals know that training is more than just a nice gesture. It's a critical part of business.

Organizations support training departments so that the departments can do their part to help the organization reach its business goals and objectives. Like any other aspect of business—research, marketing, sales,

Aligning training to broader business goals is crucial for building trust and strengthening the bottom line.



Aligning all training to organizational requirements is the underlying reason why trainers are on the payroll, making this an essential step toward successful training.

manufacturing—training requires an investment. Organizations also expect a return on their investment.

When training is the investment, the organization expects a return in terms of improved customer satisfaction, higher sales, improved productivity, an overall increase in the bottom line, or better regulation compliance.

This step is important because your organization expects a return on its investment in training. The better you have tied the training delivered to your organization's goals, the more successful you will be as a trainer.

Aligning all training to organizational requirements is the underlying reason why trainers are on the payroll, making this an essential step toward successful training.

Linking training to the business goal

To ensure that training is aligned to organizational requirements when designing, buying, or delivering a training program, you need to identify the business goal that the training supports. Think about the nature of the goal with regard to the business. Goals typically fall into a few general categories—expense reduction, revenue generation, or regulation compliance:

- **Expense reduction.** Refresher courses might be required to decrease errors or rework a procedure; new information might be used to reduce reliance on more expensive support from consultants or other organizations; new information might also be aimed at increasing employee productivity.
- **Revenue generation.** Sales training is usually aimed at increasing sales; customer satisfaction courses are aimed at ensuring that customers return and at recommending products or services to others.
- **Regulation compliance.** Government or industry might require organizations to provide courses to prevent errors, as well as fines from regulatory agencies.

Always know how the training program you will deliver addresses organizational requirements. You need to know what training your organization needs. And at times, you need to know what training your organization does not need. How can that be? I can think of at least two scenarios.

Sometimes, management asks for training when in fact training is not the solution. For example, if one of your organization's goals is to increase customer satisfaction, no amount of training provided to your customer service department is going to achieve the goal if the real problem is slow delivery of product from your supplier.

Even if training is part of the solution, it is rarely the entire solution. Accomplishment of most goals requires a systems approach—that is, examining the entire set of inputs (materials, people, equipment, processes, and environment) and aligning them with the goal.

A second scenario occurs when the organization cannot support the training that is requested. If your organization has decided to invest in supervisory training for a large number of people, but does not have positions for all of them, the participants could become frustrated about not being able to put their new skills to use, and might seek out positions at other organizations.

Yet another scenario occurs when organizations overdesign training. In other words, they create courses that are more expensive, more involved, more time consuming, and more complex than is necessary. As a result, the programs stop before they are even completed.

Your job in all of these situations is to educate management and to provide data that supports your rationale. Take the following steps to ensure that training links to the organizational goal:

- Review all relevant documentation, such as corporate strategic and business plans, and if the training is linked to a specific department, the departmental business plans.
- Interview leaders of the departments that have requested training to clarify the problem they are trying to solve.
- Discuss the training programs you and your colleagues deliver to ensure that the programs are aligned to and support an organizational requirement.
- Be sure to stay abreast of the changes your organization is facing, and anticipate the kind of support it will need.
- Frame your questions to be certain that you have considered the issues of linking training to organizational goals (see sidebar).

Designing to meet business requirements

A trainer must incorporate myriad tasks when designing training, including developing objectives, materials, instructional methods, timing, and participation, as well as addressing questions.

Trainers must also assess session length and cost, develop audiovisuals and experiential learning activities, create a safe learning environment, practice delivery skills, and more. So concerns about adding yet another thing to remember are understandable.

Don't think of this aspect of design as one more thing to remember. Instead, think of it as a process that ties everything together so that you can systematically design a holistic learning experience. Think in terms of expanding the learning experience.

To meet business requirements, the design doesn't begin when your participants walk in the door, and it doesn't end when they leave. It begins as soon as you identify who the participants will be, and it continues until you are sure that

the participants are contributing to the intended organizational goals.

So what can you do to ensure that the design meets business requirements?

- Be sure that your design incorporates steps prior to the learning experience that prepare participants for what will happen during training. These steps should include a conversation with the employees' supervisors.
- Be sure to clarify with management what the participants are expected to do differently or better, and how this aligns with business goals.
- Identify what actions management will take to support changes following the training session (including reinforcement and feedback); share these actions with participants.
- Design support—both hard copy and online materials—that can be used following the training session.
- Ensure that participants know how their efforts will affect business goals.
- Be certain that participants know what is expected of them and how they will be held accountable following the training event.
- Clearly identify the trainer's role in support and follow-up.
- Be sure participants know how they can find assistance following the training session.

Ensuring follow-up and application

Ensuring transfer of learning is possibly one of the most important and most overlooked aspects of producing successful training. Yet if you step back and think about it, this is truly where success is defined. Many books have been written about the “did training take?” conundrum.

Rather than study why a program “doesn't take,” identify what you can do to ensure that it does. What can you do to ensure that follow-up and application of the skills and knowledge learned in the training session are implemented?

- Follow up with the managers and supervisors within 24 hours of the training session to answer questions or to goad them into action if necessary.
- Follow up with participants by asking what on-the-job actions they have taken since the training session.
- Review the accountability plan put in place during the design process.
- Gather data about how many participants are using the support systems (online, coaching, supervisory, and any others) established for them during the design. Use the data to make improvements where necessary.
- Review the training department's role to determine the level of support that is provided and whether it is appropriate for your organization's culture.

Remember that your organization invests in training and developing its people. Therefore, training and development should be treated like other investments—goals need to be aligned, appropriate plans made, and accountability measured. **T+D**

Questions to Ask Regarding Business Results

Prior to the training or learning event

- What organizational requirement will be addressed with the requested training?
- What organization or industry issues are driving the training request?
- Is training the solution? The only solution?
- How will participants' performance improve as a result of the training?
- Who are the suppliers and customers who will be affected by the training?
- What can the organization expect as a return on its investment?
- What is the value of the results?
- How will we measure the value?

During the training event

- Did the prework and conversations ensure that the participants are prepared as well as they need to be?
- Do participants know why they are attending the training session?
- How well are participants able to connect what they do to appropriate business goals?
- Do participants know how they contribute to achieving the results?
- Are participants confused by mixed messages?

After the training event

- Are managers and supervisors involved in the follow-up as planned?
- Do participants know where they can receive support?
- Was coaching available as necessary?
- Are participants held accountable?
- Are managers and supervisors held accountable?
- How accurate was our measure of value?

This article is an excerpt from chapter 2 of *10 Steps to Successful Training*. To purchase this ASTD title, visit store.astd.org.

Elaine Biech has more than three decades of training and consulting experience. She is the president of *ebb associates*; Ebbiech@aol.com.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

T+D welcomes your comments. If you would like to respond to this article, or any article that appears in *T+D*, please send your feedback to mailbox@astd.org. Responses sent to the mailbox are considered available for publication and may be edited for length and clarity.



YES!

I want to subscribe for only \$99, (\$165 Outside the U.S.) to T+D magazine—12 monthly issues that keep me at the forefront of workplace learning and performance.

TD0833

Order Information

Name: Title: Company: Address: City: State/Province: Zip/Postal Code: Country: Email: Phone: Fax:

Check One: \$99 (USA) \$165 (Outside the US) VISA MasterCard Amex Discover Check (USD) (Payable to T+D)

Card Number: Expiration Date

Signature:

Fax this form to 1.703.683.9591 OR Mail to: T+D, P.O. Box 1567; Merrifield, Virginia, 22116-9812, USA

Order online at store.astd.org Phone: 1.800.628.2783 (1.703.683.8100 outside the US)

Orders processed within three business days. If you have questions, please contact subscriberservice@astd.org

Prices valid through 12/31/2008. If you should wish to cancel your subscription for any reason, you will receive a refund on all unmailed issues. Your subscription to T+D may be a tax deductible business expense. Please allow 6 to 8 weeks to receive your first issue.

T+D is published by the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD)

010859.63250

