

Transfer of Training: Getting a R.O.I. for Your Training Dollar

By:

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Is your business or organization getting a true R.O.I (return on investment) for your employee training dollar? My training mentor, Roberta Smith, first shared this information with our local Society of Human Resource Managers organization. Even though I had experienced training as a manager, as a trainer, and as an employee I didn't understand how to ensure a better R.O.I for my investment in training. Here's what Roberta taught me—

Each year North American businesses and government agencies spend billions of dollars on training, for their employees. This is a huge investment, and thoughtful leaders recognize that there needs to be a R.O.I. The return can be realized in the forms of improved productivity and customer satisfaction as well as increased employee retention, innovation, and performance.

By some estimates however, well over 80% of the investment in training and development is wasted. This is because the new knowledge and skills gained in training are not fully applied by employees on the job. We invest in the training but don't see the "return" of improved performance on the job. There is no "transfer" of the training to the workplace.

In their book "Transfer of Training" Mary Broad and John Newstrom training transfer as the "effective and continuous application of knowledge and skills gained in training transferring training to improved performance on the workplace."

The authors begin by citing research about the distinct roles of managers, trainers, and employees in influencing training transfer. The research looked at behaviors before, during and after the training and found that the top three most powerful **role/time** combinations for transfer of training were as follows:

- #1 What the **manager** does **before** the training.
- #2 What the **trainer** does **before** the training.
- #3 What the **manager** does **after** the training.

Because managers have the greatest impact on transfer of training, let's focus on the manager's role. What can **managers** do **before** training? The list is long and includes clearly defining the skills and competencies an employee needs to be successful on the job. Employee performance is evaluated based on these criteria and continuous discussions take place with the employee so they know what they need to do their jobs well. Not every performance concern is solved or



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improved through training. But, if training is needed, managers make sure there is a good "fit" between the employees needs and the training program and instructor selected.

Then, managers brief employees about the training, its importance, and set up training transfer goals to be evaluated after training is complete. Transfer of training becomes a job performance standard that is evaluated and coaching is provided to assist the employee's efforts to utilize the new knowledge and skills gained in training.

The manager also plays a crucial role in any organization as the "model" of the training. I asked students for an example of the manager not "walking the talk" employees received in training. Lots of hands went up. One student told me about being sent to safety training by a manager who "scoffed" at O.S.H.A. regulations and didn't wear personal safety gear. Employees were preconditioned to not learn or transfer learning. We can't expect employees to "do as I say, not as I do."

Managers also work **before** training to assist **trainers** in linking training to the strategic goals of the organization, helping trainer receive input from employees, and providing the trainer with clearly defined performance outcomes. "At the end of the training the employee will be able to..."**After training managers** speak to the employee about how the new skills and information gained can be applied on the job. The manager and employee set realistic time frames for the new skills to become routine behavior. Throughout this stage, managers model the behavior expected of employees, encourage opportunities for employees to

"practice" the new skills and give timely, balanced feedback. Our goal at this stage as managers is to do everything we can to prevent "relapse" back to pre-training performance. It's human nature to revert back to what's familiar until the new skill is experienced and reinforced often enough to become a new habit.

After training is a great opportunity to recognize participation in company newsletters or staff meetings. Transfer of training can be increased by providing venues for employees to talk to others and demonstrate their new knowledge and skills.

For more information on transfer of training, read in the book Broad and Newstrom's "Transfer of Training: Action-Packed Strategies to Ensure High Payoff from Training Investments."

Jeri Mae Rowley, M.S. Human Resource Management, is a popular speaker, trainer and facilitator. By weaving together her unique humor and storytelling skills, Jeri Mae helps individuals and organizations improve leadership, communications, and customer service. Participants in her programs often comment: "She's not boring!"

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