



## THE SOUND OF ONE HAND CLAPPING

HOW TO AVOID TRAINING WITH NO IMPACT

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### The Embarrassing Effects of Naked Training

In today's economy—with its shrinking resources and expanding global reach—leaders face challenges unheard of 10 years ago. How can any one company be as quick as a start-up, as comprehensive as a multinational, and as cutting-edge as a pure vertical player?

To be fruitful and multiply, C-level leaders everywhere are struggling to crack that nut.

And where do they turn for help? Increasingly, they are turning to their learning and development professionals, who prepare managers, salespeople, and service providers to meet new challenges and contribute tangibly to the bottom line. Yet, as budgets shrink to maximize profit, trainers with fewer resources may pare back supporting structures and activities so all that remains is a string of naked training events. The predictable outcome is like the sound of one hand clapping: plenty of effort, but absolutely no impact.

Like other training authorities, AchieveGlobal has observed the following pattern in organizations large and small:

- A training initiative begins energetically with ample investment in content.
- Leaders, however, fail to define current and desired states, or, to invest the resources to move successfully from planning to execution to evaluation.
- As a result, training becomes a series of isolated events, divorced from a context that supports new behaviors and improves business performance.
- Therefore, the initiative fails not from a lack of ideas, but from a lack of execution.<sup>1</sup>

To compound the problem, the tools of training are changing. Leaders must evaluate eLearning, m-learning, e-mentors, JIT learning, and EPS to decide how to allocate resources. As useful as they might be, these tools are effectively new links in the chain, so they increase the likelihood of a break.

However, this pattern of less-than-stellar training implementation is no one's fault. Trainers and their managers serve many masters, and complex project management may not be a departmental strong suit. Since the impact is real, however, this paper offers an alternative.

<sup>1</sup> Bossidy, L. and R. Charan, *Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done*, Crown Business (2002)

## The Magic's in the Method

A 2004 PricewaterhouseCoopers global survey confirmed once and for all that the best-performing companies follow a clear process for managing change.<sup>2</sup> Effecting change through training is no different: it requires systematic implementation, which is defined here as ensuring the transfer of skills to learners and through them into the workplace. You don't need to be told that training is a major investment of time and money whose ultimate goal is improved business performance. Maximizing your investment and achieving that goal takes planning, execution, and evaluation—in short, an efficient, proven implementation process. Without that process, training becomes a mere event, or a set of tools residing on a server somewhere. Without that process, training usually fails to support the strategic momentum of your organization. For training to produce that kind of behavioral change, you'll need to:

- Apply best practices to design, deliver, and support training aligned to strategic goals.
- Follow a rigorous process as you implement a comprehensive training plan.

### Training Best Practices: "I Know, I Care, I Can"

A primary determinant of training success is a work environment that helps learners master and apply new skills. We sum up 30 years of global training experience by saying that lasting behavior change is most likely when learners can say:

*I KNOW* what you want me to do and why you want me to do it.

*I CARE* about doing it.

*I CAN* do it, and I'm rewarded for doing it.

No training tool by itself—whether classroom, eLearning, m-learning, action learning, or EPS—can induce learners to say with conviction, "I know, I care, I can." But under the right conditions, any of these tools can have a dramatic impact. Consider how you can foster an environment where your initiative achieves its potential and learners truly change:

<sup>2</sup> *Boosting Business Performance through Programme and Project Management*, PricewaterhouseCoopers (2004)

<sup>3</sup> *Human Capital Index: Linking Human Capital and Shareholder Value*, Watson Wyatt Worldwide Research (2002)

## THE POWER OF COMMITMENT

*"We recently teamed with a large global health and hygiene company to maximize the results of training. The Stellar Implementation Process™ added a level of senior involvement,"* said Vicki Ryan, AchieveGlobal's professional services manager for the project.

*"In the kickoff session, we identified the results that the company wants, and gained the commitment of managers and union reps to support the training."*

According to Ryan, the process helped HR and Operations people feel positive and clear about what they needed to do. The company's executive in charge of the project said the implementation is exceeding expectations, attributing success to the management support created by following the process.

- **Communicate a clear vision.** Learners who see how training supports important big-picture goals are much more likely to commit to the training. To connect learners to the vision, leaders must make the case for change, define roles, remove barriers, communicate in good faith, and make progress clear with relevant metrics.
- **Highlight a compelling reason for change.** To realize the benefits of training, learners need a compelling reason to change. Findings from a 2002 global study from Watson Wyatt highlight the value of this practice: Compared to organizations whose employees see a weak link between their work and strategic goals, organizations whose employees see a strong link return four times the total value to shareholders.<sup>3</sup>

- **Help leaders demonstrate their commitment.** Until leaders at all levels demonstrate and recognize the knowledge and skills covered in training, learners see little reason to adopt new behaviors in the workplace. To move learners from compliance to commitment, leaders must model the content of the training.<sup>4</sup>
- **Articulate the value of training to learners.** Learners who understand how training moves them toward important goals—theirs and the organization’s—can answer the eternal question, “What’s in it for me?” When a leader reinforces the role of training in the professional and personal success of individual learners, they grasp the value of the training at a visceral, not simply a cognitive, level.
- **Provide requisite knowledge and skills.** A learners’ desire to change is fruitless without the knowledge and skills that empower genuine change. Since knowledge and skills are the building blocks of lasting capability, it’s important to carefully identify and validate training content that will support key organizational initiatives.
- **Align processes and systems.** With the uncertainty and confusion of learning new skills, people may rely on existing processes and systems—a real problem when current methods conflict with what is needed. To promote application of new knowledge and skills, it’s vital to identify current policies, processes, and systems that hinder skill application and take action to adjust, remove, or replace them.

Applying these best practices promotes the conditions in which learners are likely to say, “I know, I care, I can.” But no matter how warm and fuzzy your environment, achieving best results from your initiative takes scrupulous

planning and execution. Without a structured process—assigning critical resources to delivery, support, and evaluation—your initiative will realize neither an acceptable return on investment nor a measurable impact on performance.

### **The Stellar Implementation Process™**

A complex initiative linked to strategic goals can seem a daunting challenge. To help maximize scarce internal resources, AchieveGlobal has developed the Stellar Implementation Process™, which distills decades of experience in planning, executing, and evaluating training initiatives. Appropriate to any initiative (regardless of scope, complexity, or geographic distribution), this process promotes success through application of the training best practices above within a scalable, multi-stage process:

To ensure that training supports key organizational goals, a critical first step is skill selection. In consultation with affected leaders and often with external experts, training professionals assess performance gaps and identify the skills and related knowledge to be included in training. They then validate their skill selection by answering key questions to make sure that the skills have the desired impact. Among those questions:

- What are the desired business results?
- What is your overall strategy to achieve those results?
- Do learners see the relevance of training to this strategy?
- What are the gaps between current and desired behavior?
- What data indicate these gaps?
- What are the consequences if you do not conduct training?



<sup>4</sup> Huggett, James F., *When Culture Resists Change*, AchieveGlobal, Inc. (2002)

- How will you measure success?
- Is this initiative aligned with other training and strategic initiatives?
- What else is happening that may affect the implementation?

After validating the selected skills against your goals for the initiative, you're ready to begin implementation, which contains three phases: Plan, Execute, and Evaluate.

- **Plan:** This phase weaves strong ideas with best practices in a detailed project definition and plan. The definition articulates the overall vision, linking organizational strategy to the training itself, and outlines scope, goals, and compelling reason to change. An effective definition promotes the buy-in of

#### **JUMP-STARTING A STALLED INITIATIVE**

*When we partnered with a government agency to restart a stalled training initiative, the team turned immediately to the Stellar Implementation Process™. Using best practices and tools to guide planning, assign action items, conduct conference calls, share content, and post key documents to the client's intranet, the team gave the initiative the push it needed. Now in the Execute phase, the initiative is going very well, facilitators are getting rave reviews, and the client has accelerated the timeline. The client is thrilled with the progress. In a letter to our team, the client wrote, "Thanks so very much for all you are doing and have done to make this a more manageable project for us. What first seemed insurmountable, now feels workable because of your help. We can do this!"*

stakeholders and gives learners a reason to say, "I know what you want me to do and why you want me to do it." As the foundation for a comprehensive plan, the definition also establishes focus with benchmarks, milestones, success factors, and risks. Based on this definition, you then create the implementation plan that outlines logistics within a holistic picture of how you'll apply best practices to achieve desired outcomes.

- **Execute:** While people love to talk creatively about high-level training strategy, in both the research literature and our direct experience, the ability to manage the implementation is the central driver of successful training initiatives.<sup>5</sup> Continuous communication and adherence to the project plan is especially important to lasting behavior change. During the Execute phase, training professionals prepare, conduct, and review learning activities and events, minimize deviations from schedule, and report progress to stakeholders. In a properly executed initiative, leaders demonstrate commitment through their actions, applaud those who adopt desired behaviors, and coach any who may struggle. As a result, learners are able to say, "I can do what you want me to do, I'm rewarded for doing it, and I care about doing what you want me to do."
- **Evaluate:** You truly know if an initiative has achieved its goal only when you measure its results. Evaluation involves a careful review of the positive results of training, deviations from plan, and resulting lessons learned. Key measures during this phase include how often and with what impact learners use their new skills and exhibit improved behaviors. Training leaders communicate these results to stakeholders and celebrate successes with all involved. Since learning is cyclical, it's vital to apply any lessons learned to future initiatives.

<sup>5</sup> *Boosting Business Performance through Programme and Project Management*, PricewaterhouseCoopers (2004)

## GETTING UP AND RUNNING ... FAST

*Determined to double its stores and employees in the next three years, a global retail chain knew it had a training dilemma. The Stellar Implementation Process™ was a clear factor in the client's decision to partner with us. The client saw the rigor, structure, and accountability inherent in the process, and knew it met an internal need they had for getting the project successfully launched. The implementation team recently completed the project-definition and planning meeting, producing a clear plan with an aggressive yet realistic timeline and agreements on working expectations. The client has expressed delight with both the partnership and the process.*

### The Other Hand

Like any good method, the Stellar Implementation Process™ is rigorous and comprehensive, replete with sub-processes and tools to promote success at every stage. At a higher level, however, five unifying principles emerge:

1. **Align training with strategic goals.** An initiative unrelated to key business issues is unlikely to have a lasting impact.
2. **Measure twice, cut once.** Training results are directly proportional to up-front definition and planning.
3. **Beat the drum.** A plan in itself cannot bring success; regular communication is the key to good execution.
4. **Balance people and process.** “What’s in it for me?” is a central question for everyone involved—you, trainers, functional leaders, and senior leaders—not just for learners.
5. **Tailor best practices to your own needs.** Your culture is unique; training should be the same.

Ultimately, training success is the union of good ideas and meticulous execution—two hands working together to produce outstanding results. As we’ve said, it’s easy to generate good ideas, but it’s even easier to fail to carry them out. This brief paper has mapped out a well-traveled path to consistent new skills and behaviors in the workplace. Followed carefully, this path can lead to thunderous applause for training that promotes long-term organizational success.

### ABOUT ACHIEVEGLOBAL

With its world headquarters in Tampa, Florida, AchieveGlobal helps organizations translate business strategies into business results by improving the performance of their people. Clients around the world rely on Achieve-Global’s proven expertise in leadership development, customer service, and sales effectiveness. By implementing research-based learning solutions, AchieveGlobal empowers clients to successfully develop leaders and acquire, grow, and retain profitable customer relationships.



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