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How to Select a Training Contractor:

10 Characteristics of Highly Effective Training for Maximum ROI

A SPECIAL REPORT
FOR TRAINING OFFICERS AND
STAFF EDUCATIONAL EVENT COORDINATORS

How to Select a Training Contractor:

10 Characteristics of Highly Effective Training for Maximum ROI

Overview.

Learning leadership skill does not always occur by casual observation or natural osmosis. The act of learning how to lead should be intentional and come as the direct result of facilitated training and apprenticeship. In today's economy, where organizational budgets are constrained and creative spending has become even more essential to survival, when financial managers must look for effective ways to save money – one of the first line items to be cut from the budget is often training. Big mistake. This paper will present a compelling case for the importance and relevance of training, the ten characteristics you should seek in a training firm to get the maximum return on investment of your training dollars, and the organizational benefits of a strong training program.

The Problem.

You have probably had some unfortunate experiences with trainers. They breeze in with fast talk and all the latest buzzwords, poorly designed, overstuffed PowerPoint presentations, and games that no professionals who are serious about their work want to play. Afterward, your participants are disappointed. They haven't learned anything new. The material presented was so generic that they can find no reasonable application to their work. The problems and challenges they sought to address are still unresolved. And to make matters worse, after so many hours or days of "training," they are way behind on their work.

You're reluctant to bring in yet another trainer. You know that if the learning experience you've planned comes to an unpleasant end, it will be seen as a negative reflection on you and your department. Yet you know that your people need help. Some important KSAs (knowledge, skills, and abilities) are lacking and productivity levels are not what they should be. You're in a dilemma. How do you resolve this challenge?

What do you look for in a trainer that will give you reasonable assurance of a successful training event and a great ROI?

The Background.

First, let's clarify the term. What is training? In and of itself, the word training can be a little vague and can have many interpretations. For purposes of this paper, let's define training this way:

Training is the action of teaching a person a particular business skill or workplace behavior.

To take that a step further, ***training not only teaches but facilitates a quality, pragmatic, hands-on learning experience.***

Engagement in the workplace today is at a serious low. Recent research [[Gallup](#)] reveals that 70% of those in the workplace population are not engaged with the work they're doing.



And many of these workers are not only disengaged, but *unhappy*. Additionally, many are ill-equipped to do the jobs they are doing. Small wonder that so many are disengaged. The requirement to attend training can be seen as just another unpleasant, mandatory task to be completed or worse, as a mindless escape from the drudgery of the workday.

It's easy to see why training is so often the first thing cut when looking for ways to save money. Why spend on training when already disengaged employees are not going to learn anything new and will not be contributing to workflow productivity while they're gone?

Sourcing a quality training experience can reset that whole perspective. **Training that encompasses the right mix of motivation, engagement, and dynamic activity can get employees excited about their work.** If the participants leave the training with solutions to their challenges, information that can be immediately applied in the workplace, and the practical, hands-on experience of actually trying out the techniques they have learned, then training becomes a profitable investment in human capital management and productivity with a high rate of return.

The remainder of this paper will offer a solution to your training dilemma: the 10 characteristics of a training firm that you should seek in your selection process and the benefits your organization will derive. These selection criteria not only ensure an excellent training experience, but knowledge and experience that will "stick" with the participants long after the training has ended.



OVERVIEW: 10 CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE TRAINING

1. Pragmatic Engagement.
2. Immediate and Ongoing Motivation.
3. Stellar Reputation.
4. Experience and Expertise.
5. Controlled Facilitation.
6. Maximum Retention.
7. Customization.
8. Convenient Location.
9. Consultation Service.
10. Investment Value.



The Solution: 10 Characteristics of Highly Effective Trainers

Facilitated training provides an opportunity for participants to learn through experience, in other words, to consume the training content in a learn-by-doing environment. Thirty years of research and development in training delivery methods and evaluation of feedback from thousands of participants in soft skills training events have demonstrated the value of the following characteristics. These ten areas should be standards of any successful training entity.

1. Pragmatic Engagement. Generic approaches fail to engage participants because general theory usually cannot adequately address the specific, real-time issues that occur in each workplace environment. Your participants should never walk out of your training event saying, *"Well, that was interesting but, unfortunately, none of it applied to my work."* Our world has become fully interactive and the days of passively sitting through a workplace training lecture are gone. Participants want to do just that – *participate*. They want to be active in their own learning process. They want to return to the workplace able to apply what they have just learned in their real-time environment.

Unsuccessful trainers miss the mark in this key area. Some offer written handouts to provide the academic content while relying on "entertainment" to fill the rest of the time allotted – games and testing instruments that provide humor and interesting personality profiles but sometimes fail to take the learning experience to the next and most important level – the level of onsite, workplace applicability of the material.

Generic and entertainment approaches can fail to bridge the gap between training activities and relevance on the job.

To be effective, training must be pragmatic – practical and pertinent to the participants'

actual work challenges. Our experience has shown that **participants remain focused and engaged throughout the training when their needs are being met, their concerns are being addressed, their problems are being resolved, and they are mastering new skills that will be immediately applicable in their workplace.** The training program to be presented should contain generous opportunities for the participants to work through problem-solving exercises, participate in group and class discussions, and share experiences that relate to the topic at hand. A light on lecture, heavy on group involvement approach is key to maintaining a high level of engagement throughout the training. Key to the success of a training event is building in opportunities for the participants to resolve their own specific challenges through practical experience.

2. Immediate and Ongoing Motivation. The facilitator should **open the training with enthusiastic energy, grabbing the participants' attention from the first moment.** The training leader only has a few moments to make that crucial first impression and get things going. Those opening moments set the pace for the remainder of the course. Once that immediate impression has been made, the facilitator must keep the energy level elevated and flowing and the motivation high to participate in exercises



that are dynamic, stimulating, and thought-provoking. Here are some examples of the kinds of comments you should hear from participants after a training event:

"The in-class participation and specific questions from the class [benefitted me most]. I came away from this course with specific ideas about how to improve my communication with my supervisor and some techniques for dealing with conflicting interests. Any employees would benefit from increasing and adding depth to their communication skills."

"The 5 negotiation techniques and the role plays [benefitted me most]. I enjoyed the class and felt that it was very beneficial to me in my job. The learning model was especially pertinent. I am going to work on using the 5 techniques and implement the learning model in my thought process in communication with other people ..."

"This was one of the best sessions that I have attended. We were provided the opportunity to give specific situations that we deal with on a daily basis and figure out ways to make our actions more tangible."

When considering a trainer, look for testimonials that provide specific evidence of effective methodology and most importantly, lasting results – the applicability of the training upon return to the workplace.

- 3. Stellar Reputation.** What are others saying about the training company you are considering? **The company you select should have a strong web presence – an informative website that provides answers to your questions and clear point of contact information, and an active social media presence, either as a company or through its principals.** The training company should be able to provide professional references and

testimonials from participants in previous training events.

Selecting a trainer can sometimes feel like pointing with blinders on and hoping to pick the right target. Sometimes you will have to go with your instincts – gut feelings usually don't steer you wrong. Call the references provided and ask about prior participants' responses. Get recommendations from other training officers.

- 4. Experience & Expertise.** Startup companies may hold great promise with dynamic and energetic new trainers – but there's something to be said as well for **longevity of experience and the expertise that comes with an extensive track record of excellence.** With experience comes the ability to gauge the classroom and shift gears when necessary. That means being able to take the training to a higher level if the audience is more sophisticated than expected or to segue if there's an important issue that needs to be addressed in class. A seasoned facilitator has the expertise to transition without missing a beat. That results in participant responses like the following: *"The entire training was superb. [Facilitator] was very motivational and provided many different perspectives and options. His time management of the material and lessons were right on target, never leaving room to get bored. He responded well to the different personalities of the class and recognized the need for changes in mode. Overall, I would rate this class A+, the best training I have ever received under [organization]'s leadership training courses. I learned techniques I plan to utilize."*

- 5. Controlled Facilitation.** Seasoned experience and expertise feed directly into the area of classroom control. You have probably seen what happens when a seminar leader has lost control of the room. People speak out of turn, interrupting each



other or preventing others from speaking, and audible side conversations distract from the discussion on the floor. Ask the prospective facilitator how disruptions from difficult participants are handled. Ask what techniques the facilitator uses to keep the course agenda on track.

The training company you select should offer a variety of facilitation methods that follow a pre-established course agenda. The best methods include a combination of working in pairs or small groups for problem solving and discussion, role-play and simulation exercises in which the participants assume leadership roles and act out their responses to relevant situations presented, and conference-style lectures in which the facilitator makes brief presentations on key topic issues followed by exploratory activities for the participants to gain practical experience in the topic area. Group interaction and peer exchange are vital to comprehension as participants can learn so much from each other while assimilating the facilitator's expertise.

- 6. Maximum Retention.** The most important question to ask after a training event is what are the participants taking away? What have they learned? Have the training objectives been met? How long will the techniques and strategies stick – be retained – by the course participants? **The training you select should have built-in methodologies to ensure that the participants remember the material.** An important part of that is applicability of the material. An interesting topic that is not practical or useful for your work environment will neither get you to maximum retention nor maximum return on investment of your training dollars. Ensure that the material to be covered can be applied immediately upon return to the workplace. This will help to ensure that the information taught is retained.

- 7. Course Customization. The best training company is one that provides custom tailoring to your training content needs and flexibility to meet your schedule.** Rather than present a one-size-fits-all course on presentation skills, for example, your training company should be able to incorporate other factors pertinent to your unique workplace such as preparing presentations specifically for high level technical executives. If your schedule does not permit your staff to be away from the office for several consecutive days, the training firm should be able to present other schedule options that will meet your needs. Added values can include extras such as field exercises conducted outside of seminar hours, pre- and post-exams to measure comprehension of the materials presented, and follow-up sessions to assess results after a specified period of time.

- 8. Convenient Location. The training company should be able to offer a number of convenient ways to bring the training to your people.** Whether conducting the training at your site, renting a conference facility, or holding virtual/online sessions, a prepared training company will be able to accommodate you at your point of need.

- 9. Consultation Service. Select a training company that offers management consulting and coaching services.** That expertise will prove to be a valuable asset in the training environment and provide additional resources to resolve organizational problems that go beyond participant needs in the classroom.

- 10. Investment Value.** Ensure that the training you offer will meet the needs of the participants. **When employee needs are valued and addressed, motivation increases, and productivity soars.** The following model illustrates the high return on investment value of quality training.



Training Program Benefits Model

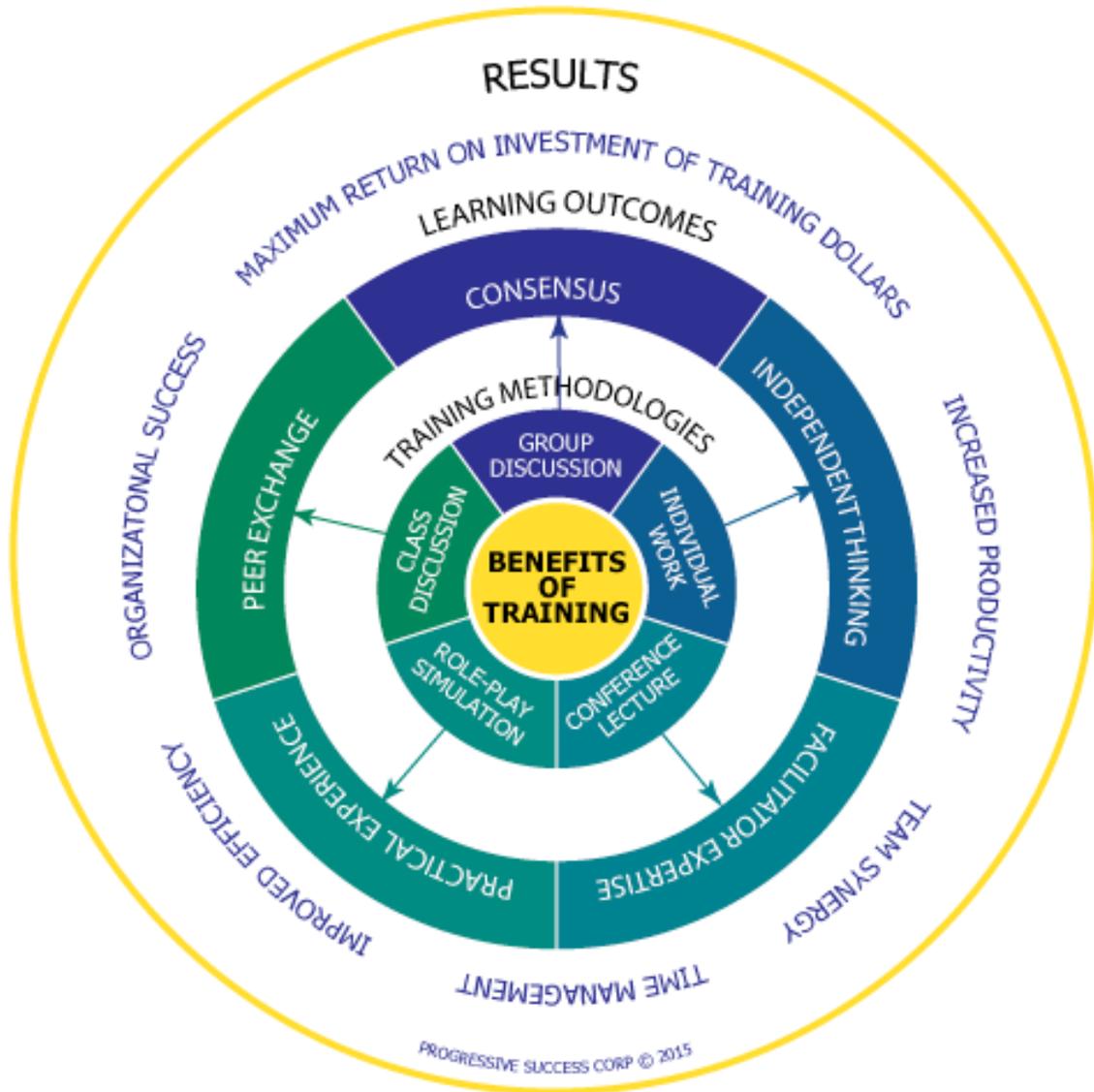


Figure 1. Training Benefits Model 1



Advance Preparation

Prior to contacting a training contractor, complete some advance preparation so that you can seek specifics and make the most efficient use of your training event planning time. Following are some activities that will provide you the background information you will need to set up your program and thus find the right facilitation team to deliver the training.

Conduct a Needs Assessment. Ensure that you know what your staff needs. Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment to determine the skill areas that need improvement. You can conduct your assessment by taking a survey at each employee level from executive to support staff. Hold focus groups to discuss specific topic needs and solicit input on how those needs can best be addressed. Develop a comprehensive list of interview questions for the training contractors you interview based on the 10 characteristics outlined in this report. Hold a showcase conference and invite several contractors to demonstrate their training/facilitation skills and have the audience complete evaluations or provide follow-up feedback via email. Conduct one-on-one meetings with select managers, supervisors, team leaders, and employees to acquire additional direct input and feedback on training needs.

Review and Analyze Assessment Results. Once you have completed these information-gathering activities, compile all of your research data for review. Analyze the results for significant trends and commonalities.

Build Training Program. The results of your analysis should form the basis for building a solid training program that meets the expressed needs of your staff.

Develop a Calendar of Events. Create a training schedule and solicit contractors who can accommodate your proposed schedule. Include some flexibility such as alternative dates and times so that you can book the best talent. Be sure to publicize your training events well in advance to ensure maximum attendance and participation.

Conclusion

Today's workplace is rapidly changing – it's an environment steered by workers from multiple generations, diverse backgrounds, and changes in gender balance with more women in the workforce than at any other time in history. Additionally, incredible advances in technology are changing the way we do business.

Today's workforce needs training in order to keep pace with technology, build and maintain productivity levels, and communicate effectively in a global economy.

To obtain maximum return on investment, ensure that your training program meets the expressed needs of your staff. A quality training program will result in improved time management and efficiency, increased productivity, team synergy and motivation, and increased engagement – all of which lead to organizational success and maximum ROI.



PROGRESSIVE SUCCESS CORPORATION

Resources

Gallup.com Research Study:

State of the American Workplace, Employee Engagement Insights for U.S. Business Leaders

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(<http://www.gallup.com/services/178514/state-american-workplace.aspx#>)

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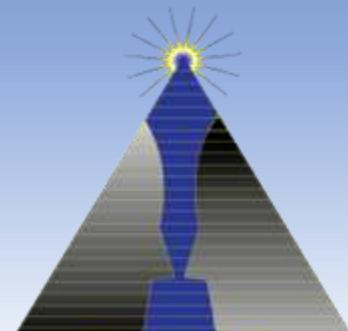


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