

How **Coaching After Training** Helps Ensure Performance Improvement





Sometimes managers feel frustration when they send team members to training but don't see as much performance improvement from those team members as they hoped for.

Training is a proven-effective development tool and productivity-builder but it takes time for people to process new information, set aside old thinking habits and attitudes and start applying new skills. And often when trainees get back on the job, the impact of the training can be diluted by:

- Heavy workloads that distract them from processing new information and practicing new skills
- Co-workers' skepticism and disparagement of efforts to do things differently
- Lack of opportunity to get questions answered that come up after the training
- Lack of reinforcement and accountability for using the information

However, there is one key step businesses can take to make training much more effective—provide coaching afterward to help trainees overcome these dilution issues.

Providing coaching sends a strong signal that everyone who goes to training is expected to apply the information from it and will be given help and encouragement to do so. It's a form of positive accountability, and it emphasizes the need for measurable performance improvement.

Here's how coaching fits into the process of successful training:

1. **Learning objectives** are set and trainees know what they are in advance of the training so the organization's expectations are clear
2. **Interactive training** is designed and delivered to give trainees new information and skills, as well as an opportunity to simulate using their new skills in a safe environment
3. **Personal action plans** are developed by trainees at the end of training to set goals and identify the specific actions they will take in order to apply the information on the job
4. **Coaching sessions** are conducted to review the training information, answer questions, provide guidance and encouragement and refine personal action plans
5. **Evaluations** of performance improvement are provided to trainees by their managers as part of the performance management process

HOW TO IMPLEMENT COACHING AFTER TRAINING

There are many variables to consider in planning coaching after training such as the topic area being trained, the number and location of the trainees (on-site or remote), the experience and background of trainees, time available and who will act as coaches.

Coaching can be provided by different people and different methods. For example, a coach can be the trainee's manager, mentor, trainer or a professional coach. Coaching sessions can be done with individuals face-to-face, by phone or by email, or it can be done with small groups face-to-face, by teleconference, by video conference or by Web conference. And there can be different combinations of all these options. So, how does a training professional select the best way of coaching?

Here are some key questions to answer in order to help determine the best coaching approach:

- Do the skills being trained lend themselves more to a particular kind of coaching?
- Can the coaching be done in small groups, or will some people be better served if they have individual coaching?
- What medium will work best—face-to-face, telephone, etc.?
- What methods of coaching should be used, and how long should sessions last?
- How many coaching sessions after a training session will be most effective? If more than one, at what intervals?
- What combinations of individual and small group coaching and different media will work best?

It's easiest to start with a basic coaching model as a template, and then modify it as you think the process through for a particular training session. Here are the elements of one basic approach to coaching after training:

Basic Coaching Model

Small discussion groups (up to 10 people per group) face-to-face and/or using teleconferences

One coaching session of 2 – 3 hours led by the trainer 30 days after the training

Trainer facilitates discussion by:

- Reviewing the learning objectives of the training session
- Asking for feedback on individual personal action plan progress, obstacles, etc.
- Setting up role-plays to help individuals practice specific skills

Participants revise their personal action plans



Now let's modify this approach for the following hypothetical training challenge:

A group of 40 mechanical engineering supervisors in a large civil engineering firm will be receiving training on how to lead more productive project meetings. The purpose is to reduce the number of missed project deadlines due to lack of meeting discipline by the supervisors and failure to hold project team members accountable for executing assignments. The primary learning objectives include:

- Ensure meetings start and end on time and agendas are completed
- Communicate tactfully and directly to their teams and individual team members about expectations for completing assignments on time
- Involve all project team members in meeting discussions rather than allowing one or two individuals to dominate

Half of the supervisors are located in the firm's headquarters in Norfolk, Virginia, and the other half is spread around the eastern seaboard. The one-day training sessions will be conducted simultaneously with two groups of 20 supervisors at headquarters by external (contract) trainers during an annual firm conference in which all participants will be physically present.

The internal training professional responsible for the training also planned coaching by considering the basic coaching model described on the previous page. He then made the changes in the right column of the chart on the next page.

Basic Coaching Model	Modified Approach
Small discussion groups (up to 10 people per group) face-to-face and/or using teleconferences	All participating supervisors will be divided into four groups of 10 each for coaching sessions using Web conference software and voice communication. Several supervisors will receive additional one-on-one coaching (face-to-face and via telephone) from the training professional overseeing the training because of their personal needs to develop better project meeting leadership skills quickly.
One coaching session of 2 – 3 hours led by the trainer 30 days after the training	There will be two 2-hour coaching sessions spaced at 30-day intervals after the training. Individual coaching sessions will occur each week after the training and after group coaching sessions for up to six weeks. This is because the need to accomplish the learning objectives is critical.
Trainer facilitates discussion by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing the learning objectives of the training session • Asking for feedback on individual personal action plan progress, obstacles, etc. • Setting up role-plays to help individuals practice specific skills 	The two external trainers will lead the coaching sessions for the 20 supervisors they have in their training sessions in two groups of 10 each. The trainers will give feedback to the training professional overseeing the training about the groups' progress and problems in pursuing their personal action plans and any issues individuals are having. The training professional will follow up and provide individual coaching as appropriate.
Participants revise their personal action plans	Trainers will facilitate discussions on the original personal action plans developed at the end of the training session (which will be sent to participants' managers) and will help participants revise their personal action plans at the end of each coaching session. These revised plans will also be sent to participants' managers.

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT COACHING AFTER TRAINING

Coaching after training demonstrates the organization's expectations and commitment to its managers and employees, and it overcomes the majority of obstacles to performance improvement associated with dilution of training. Conducting coaching sessions virtually ensures that all participants will improve their skills to a significantly higher level than training without coaching. It's a true investment that will provide returns of many multiples over any costs involved.



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