

The Enablers of Education

Training experts say planners should create strategic process for skills & knowledge transfer

By William Ng

Are meeting planners doing enough when it comes to maximizing the effectiveness of their training meetings? Not so, say training experts.

Education specialists stress that only when planners become the shepherds of a strategic training process can employees' skills and behavior be tuned to yield performance improvements that enhance their companies' bottom line. Planners must become proactive in collaborating not only with content providers in developing effective training sessions, but also with trainees and their managers before and after those meetings to ensure relevant knowledge transfer and retention.

What is happening, said Michael Nolan, president of Friesen, Kaye and Associates, a performance-improvement consultancy based in Ottawa, Ont., is that not enough planners are making the connection between content and business objectives. "Will people's performance change because of the new skills, and are they ultimately going to get the results the company wants?" said Nolan.

In planning training content, "you have to begin with the end in mind and focus on what you want the results to be," said Joanne Corby, president of U Expansion Inc., a corporate education specialist based in Melbourne, Fla. Evaluation of business objectives should be the first step in training-meeting planning, she said, and this is where many planners fail, by not designing conferences with that in mind.

"The planner must make clear to the content provider what the meeting objectives are, the company's expectation and the takeaways for the audience," said Nolan. "Often, planners do not get into that tactical approach when working with presenters."

Training also needs to be stimulating, support employees' personal goals and development, and leverage trainee feed-

back to achieve desired results and retain talent. Of note to meeting planners is that training should be co-owned by employees and their managers, and it should be driven by feedback and reinforcement processes initiated during the meeting itself.

"Training has got to be a two-way street and be positive," said Don Farrell, a sales training consultant and founder of corporate education firm Signature Worldwide located in Dublin, Ohio. "You have got to give people the personal development they're looking for, to find and keep good talent."

Plus, Farrell said, "We need to get away from the cookie-cutter stuff, where attendees are expected to absorb eight straight hours of lectures. That's still rampant."

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Farrell, for example, uses incentives during training sessions to stimulate learning and attendee participation.

"We pay people dollar bills for honest ideas," said Farrell. Even though an attendee's idea, he said, "might be stupid, I'll say, 'Hey, here's a buck for speaking up.'"

Nolan said giving attendees time to reflect and allowing purposeful questioning also are important. "Get learners active by making them find practical ways to apply concepts. If they don't see the practicality, they tune out."

Planners then need to better determine whether learning took place at the event, whether the knowledge and skills present-

ed were transferred back to the job and, even further, whether the training successfully aligned with company goals.

Working with attendees on feedback is more than just finding out whether they liked the meeting and understood the content, said Nolan. He said planners must post-test trainees; tap into their concerns and personal goals; and identify follow-up initiatives — be they additional

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training, one-on-one coaching or self-directed learning — in order to drive home the knowledge transfer.

Planners also must work with managers to ensure learning reinforcement. "The planner can present what the training meeting involved and what their employees learned," Nolan said. "Many times, managers feel their responsibility is over once they nominate their subordinate to attend a meeting. Maybe an event to train the managers of those learners is needed."

And before the next training event, "planners should be asking managers what kinds of employee skill sets should be reinforced," Nolan continued. "The idea is to get managers and their employees to collaborate; planners can be facilitators."

"The hardest part of training is reinforcement," said Farrell. "We can get everyone excited during the meeting, but unless there's continual reinforcement, it's not going to work." ■

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