

Most Training Fails: **A QBQ! (The Question Behind the Question) QuickNote**

I have been in the training industry since 1986, and there's something I know that you probably know, too: **Most training fails.**

Yes, fails. Too often training makes no difference. It adds no value, creates no change—and in the end, is a cost rather than an investment. Why? Because both buyers and sellers make mistakes. *And in the current economy, we can't afford mistakes.*

On the "vendor" side, more often than not, the training rep is hungrier to make the sale than the buyer is to complete the purchase. Thus, desperation can lead the vendor to sell the client the wrong training, just to make a sale. Many years ago, a paper manufacturer contracted for a three day senior staff "management training" project facilitated by yours truly. Looking back, it was not what they needed. What this group (can you say *dysfunction junction?*) really required was an extensive intervention by skilled therapists. In way over my head, the project failed. My name was Mud. And, honestly, it was *my bad.*

Furthermore, some training suppliers don't just sell the *wrong* product, they sell a *bad* product. There's a lot of junk on the training market, and when it doesn't work, it gives the industry a well-deserved lousy reputation—and is a waste of the customer's time, energy, and money.

On the buying side, even when clients purchase really great stuff, they too can make really big mistakes. One banking institution acquired \$157,500 worth of training material to use in-house—and then lost it. Yep, a year after we traded money for material, they had *still* not implemented and *could not find the product*. It had all been warehoused in well, they didn't know. But this wasn't just about misplacing paper and plastic, this was also about changing priorities. Business was now great and they were simply too busy succeeding to implement the training they'd paid for. Today, that struggling industry needs the training, but "can't afford it." *Their bad.*

To make training worthwhile, here are several "Do" and "Do Not" recommendations.

Do Not:

- **Do not buy fads.** "Everyone is doing it!" and "This author's book is hot right now!" are not reasons to buy a training program. Resist the temptation.
- **Do not buy training only "if it can be measured."** If you believe a statistical return on investment can be applied to the development of people, then I have some beach front property in Arizona to sell you. This desire to measure is often an excuse used by executives to not spend money on training. The truth is, senior managers either believe in training or they don't. **Note to trainers:** If your leaders are asking, "How will we measure it?" then they don't really believe in training at a gut level.

- **Do not rely on the training vendor for success.** Just as Mom and Dad—not the school, church, or scout leader—are accountable for the success of the child, it is the *client organization's* job to create change in people and culture, not the outsider's.
- **Do not believe there are panaceas.** Events, books, audios—these are just tools; tools that need to be used correctly. Single events need to be followed by repetition to effect change. Books require a commitment to study, discuss, and apply. As one retail book seller told me, execs "backed up the truck" to load up on mega-seller "Who Moved My Cheese?" and threw it at their people saying *CHANGE!* And then they all wondered why nothing did. There is no silver bullet.
- **Do not do "executive overviews."** What could be more arrogant than buying into the myth that the senior team only needs the short version?! Want to tear down walls, build trust, and engage employees? Have *everyone* go through the same program and mix the top folks in. And no sending the CEO and Team to the warm weather golf resort while the staff does it in the company cafeteria, either.
- **Do not allow "auditing."** If someone from another department wants to "check the program out," have them pull up a chair and get involved. People watching from afar with an *evaluation mindset* hurt the group, the program, and themselves.
- **Do not buy the lie of "customization."** Paying more to have your organization's name on a workbook does not make it customized. Nor does hiring consultants to ask a lot of questions. True customization equals **practical content** applied to *your* **problems/issues**, and this happens only when there's in-house ownership driven by in-house implementation. See "Do" on creating ownership.
- **Do not s-t-r-e-t-c-h material.** Don't do in three days what can be done in two, or in six hours what can be done in four. Stretching content kills people's desire for the next training program.
- **Do not cancel training!** Short of a natural disaster, stick with the scheduled commitment. If you don't, it wasn't ever a commitment—and the people know. Oh, and Mr. or Ms. Executive, if you're scheduled to be there, *then be there*. That's real leadership.

Do:

- **Do decide that people can change.** This is a belief held deep down, where we really live. If your organization isn't there, don't buy/do any training. It'll only fail.
- **Do use training to solve a problem.** Example: If sales are down, bring in some quality sales skills development. Don't train just to train. It's not a "To do" that we do just to check off our list.
- **Do implement training in bite-size "chunks."** People learn best when exposed to material they can apply *now*. As the wise farmer said, "I may have a barn full of hay, but I don't feed it all at once!" **The purpose of training is to get action**, so give people small amounts and let them act.
- **Do acquire practical "how to" content.** If the ideas presented don't cover the **what**, the **why**, and the **how**, then don't do the training. Life is not theoretical, so don't give learners just a bunch of theory.
- **Do buy less stuff.** The axiom "less is more" truly is true when it comes to training. Many a credenza is loaded with 3-ring binders that were never opened again after the class.

- **Do create ownership in-house.** The best learning comes from one's boss. Give the manager the tools required to do the training. Yes, she/he may not be a polished, professional trainer, but it speaks volumes when a leader engages with people in this way. And if the manager doesn't *own* the training, it'll die anyway.
- **Do stick with what you buy (unless you bought the junk).** Avoid doing the blue program one quarter, the yellow program the next, and the purple one after that. This creates confusion and cynicism—the latter being a disease that's hard to eradicate. Effecting change is based on a *commitment* to *constant* and *consistent* communication. Mixed messages never work.

There you have it. What else is there to say, other than training does not fail—*when we do it right!*

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