

WHY TRADITIONAL TRAINING DOESN'T WORK

What makes great learning or – are we getting what we are paying for?

Over the past few years, U.S. training expenditures have been on an upward trajectory. Last year alone, companies spent \$8 billion dollars on outside training products and services¹, which resulted in more spend and more hours of training for learners than in 2014. On average, companies invested \$700 per learner. Much of that spend went toward purchase of the intellectual property rights to static learning models – models that have been sold to hundreds of other companies as the “answer to their employee performance problem.” Is this spending on IP, which has gone unabated for fifty years, a good use of training money? At JMReid Group we believe the answer is a resounding, “**NO!**” Let’s consider what we know, what has happened and what is possible.

What we know about adult learning from sources like *Make It Stick (Brown & Roediger)* and Malcolm Knowles is that adult learning is effective when it is:

- Contextual and relevant to the learner
- Challenging and effortful
- Pragmatic

To make training sticky means its design:

- Draws upon both the participant’s past experience and current knowledge
- Engages their full aptitude and capabilities
- Leverages a sense of community and collaboration

Nowhere in all of what we know about adult learning does it state that the learning:

- *Must focus on a really good model, process or principle*
- *Should come from a best selling book and then be converted to learning*
- *Should have facilitators ruthlessly follow a “guide”*
- *Should be sold in “kits”*

Why the focus on content and models then?

Why do training companies focus so much on their content and models (IP)? There are two reasons, one human and understandable, the second far more self-serving.

The human one: In the creation of training, as in the birth of a child, there is always a great sense of pride and accomplishment. The training creator, be it Covey, Blanchard or DDI, sees their baby as beautiful. It’s understandable when you create content to believe that the baby (the content) is THE answer rather than AN answer. This leads to an instructional design approach focusing on “teaching” you their model, and in overvaluing its worth. Anyone who has created anything can relate to this passionate belief.

¹ Source: Training Magazine 2015 Training Industry Report, November/December 2015, www.trainingmag.com.

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The self-serving one: Training companies are in business to make money. The IP model is their economic model. Sales people are rewarded for selling “off-the-shelf” solutions. This IP model results in learning models and content that:

1. **Are overly complex.** Justifying IP value is difficult for simple and basic models, but complex ones work against the learner’s need for memorable and practical tools.
2. **Diminish relevance.** Learning cannot be about being relevant or contextual since the model has to be the answer. Traditional training firms are not built to create custom work profitably.
3. **Can’t fail.** Traditional training companies lack self-reflection and, therefore, when the program fails to hit the mark, they blame the participants, the managers or the company culture – everything but the program design or the IP (which is sacred).
4. **Are wildly inflexible.** Once a training company has an IP model, its creators resist any changes by the customer. Why? Because it would be an admission that the IP is not perfect – which it must be to command high revenues.

How has this focus on IP impacted training buyers?

The IP model leaves no one unscathed. Training buyers may get led into the following behaviors:

1. Using training solutions that are uninspired since the focus is not on design but on content.
2. Looking for the next model versus focusing on what really works.
3. Blaming the participants, managers and their company when the training does not work.
4. Purchasing more from their training providers in terms of pre- and post-learning for content that fails to address the contextual and design flaws. (The same companies that design and deliver uninspired classroom learning now want the buyer to follow them to eLearning and mobile learning.)

What is our point of view of IP driven training?

- **The baby is ugly.** Traditional training, with its focus on content and models, and the approach that it is “the answer,” is pedantic, uninspiring and frankly ugly for the majority of participants.
- **Text without context is pretext.** When training companies provide you text (without context) it is simply a pretext to sell you high margin IP.
- **Creating a simple model is easy.** Why pay for a model that does not reflect your company’s unique language and culture? We have created numerous coaching models that embrace what we all know about coaching, without tying up the budget for IP.
- **Models, steps and processes do matter.** They matter in terms of building a common language, and when they are simple and pragmatic. They have unfortunately become the tail that wags the dog.

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So if we don't spend it on IP, what should we spend the \$\$ on?

JMReid Group's point of view is that there's limited value in spending your budget on models that may be dated or are pitched as the "next best thing." Good content matters, but not at the expense of context and participant engagement.

Context is king and the first spend should be to ensure that the program is relevant to the learner and reflects the company's strategy and value. To think that a program built in 1996 magically fits (and needs no customization) for the presenting issue of a company in 2016 is farcical – and yet it happens. Discovery, focus groups, tailoring and a passion to "get it right" must be part of any training budget in order to make the learning stick.

Training designs should emphasize **engagement, discovery and creative use of visuals**. People learn when they are fully engaged – and will **remember what they say, not what you say**. Program designs should reflect these principles. Lastly, training buyers should not limit their participants to one "**thought leader**" when the world is rich with ideas that can be curated and shared.

One of our most effective learning experiences involves full color display panels that senior-level participants stand in front of, read and contemplate content directly from, highlight key points with post-it notes and share with others in small and large group discussions.

Don't let anyone tell you that classroom training doesn't work. And, don't let anyone tell you that their learning model is the "the best answer to your problem." Maximize your training investment by focusing on current research, curating the most up-to-date and meaningful content and designing a relevant experience with engaging pre- and post-learning.

Let JMReid Group help you. Your learners (employees) will thank you.

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