



## TRAINING WILL FAIL IF MANAGERS CAN'T IDENTIFY PERFORMANCE GAPS

# MANAGER INPUT: VITAL FOR LEARNING SUCCESS

**F**or training to be effective, managers need to be actively involved in the process. Some years ago, Mary Broad and her colleagues found that of all the actions and activities taking place before, during and after a formal training intervention, the manager's input before and after training constituted two of the three most important factors influencing improved performance. The third factor was the trainer's actions before the event, which also involves close coordination with managers.

Training will fail if managers can't identify their teams' performance gaps and aren't able to explain the performance they expect to achieve so that appropriate remedial action can be designed, developed and delivered. It's also likely to fail if managers don't follow up, encourage and check behavior change and performance improvement following a training event.

If managers are both supportive and actively involved, then the key outputs—improved performance and productivity—are far more likely to succeed than if the job is simply handed off to the training specialists.

While engaging managers in supporting their teams' formal training activities has been a challenge for many organizations, manager engagement in informal employee development activity is an altogether different challenge.

On the surface, the challenge of informal learning may appear to be even greater. In fact, evidence points to a number of "easy wins."

First, it appears that managers themselves tend to use informal learning approaches rather than formal off-the-job training to help improve their own performance. In 2009, Peter Casebow and his team

at GoodPractice in Edinburgh, Scotland, surveyed managers across industries. They found the five most frequently used development activities to be:

1. Informal chats with colleagues
2. Search engines
3. Trial and error
4. On-the-job instruction by their own manager or a colleague
5. Using professional magazines/literature

Not only are managers using informal learning in preference to formal learning themselves, the majority also report informal learning to be very or fairly effective as a means of helping their performance.

I have always encouraged managers to ask team members three questions at their regular meetings.

1. What have you done since we last met?
2. What have you learned from these activities?
3. What would you do differently next time?

These simple questions provide an opportunity for both manager and team member to reflect on the informal learning that's occurred and plan how best to exploit it in the future.

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