

# Running Training Like a Business

Reprinted with Permission of ASTD

By Edward A. Trolley of [KnowledgePlanet](#)



Listen. Listen to that faint, distant rhythm. What you're hearing is the sound of impatience - executive impatience. Leather soles pacing on hardwood. Fingertips drumming on desks. Pencils tapping on coffee cups. And, it's getting louder. Corporate executives from Sydney to Syracuse are looking with crossed arms and raised eyebrows at traditional training organizations. They want results.

They want the same kind of productivity and performance gains from their investment in training and development that they see from information technology, research and development, manufacturing, and sales. They want results and they want them yesterday. Executives tell us, and prove through their continual investment in training, that they believe in the value of learning. They believe committed and capable employees drive the results that shareholders demand. Executives believe in the value of learning; they want training to work. But they're not convinced that their training organizations are delivering the goods. They're right to be skeptical. Business spends billions on training, but what is the tangible return on that investment. Do we have more than neatly framed certificates that prove we attended Sales Strategy class? More competitive wins? A better close rate? Improved customer retention? More revenue? Something - Anything - that flows to the bottom line? Listen to that tapping!

In companies around the globe, the timer is expiring on training's feel-good charter, which measures success by how training participants feel when they complete a class. There's a brave new world of expectations colonizing these days, where training can and will be measured on real business results, where training is expected to deliver economic and strategic value on every investment.

Meeting these new expectations requires much more than producing better training courses; it requires transforming the traditional training operation into a customer-driven, results-hungry, value-producing machine. It requires dramatic changes in the way training interacts with the rest of the business. I call this new modus operandi "running training like a business," but whatever we call it, it changes the training game forever. It transforms training from a backroom support function to a strategic tool, fully aligned with the company's central business plans. Running training like a business produces training that is more effective in driving desired business results

and more cost-and-time-efficient in doing so. In short, it quiets the sounds of impatience that rings in the ears of training leaders.

Because of continuing changes in business itself, the need for change in training has never been more urgent. The rate of change in business accelerates every year, yet in recent decades, training has evolved only in small ways. It is worrisome in itself that many in the training and development world consider the philosophy of running training like a business a radical one. This perception indicates that the training and development sector is lagging behind the rest of business, where the demand for results has driven efficiencies and innovations that energize the bottom line.

Technology, having revolutionized virtually all other business functions, is altering fundamentally how training is designed and delivered. Business leaders, encouraged by technology's impact in other areas of their companies, have higher and often unmet expectations for training's marriage with technology.

Pushed by its customers and pulled by technology, training needs to take bigger, bolder steps - even experimental ones-to keep up with the business at large. Relentless improvement must become the battle cry for training, because ultimately much more is at stake than the patience of company executives. Training organizations that fail to keep up with business face a battle for survival, and companies that can't deliver valuable training to employees may in turn find themselves fighting for survival in the markets they serve.

Making the transition to running training like a business is a formidable undertaking. The planning is intricate; the implementation is exacting. In many ways, it is as challenging as opening a new business, because that is essentially what is involved. The transition demands hard work and total commitment.

These challenges notwithstanding, I can say unequivocally that running training like a business can silence the rhythmic tapping of executive impatience. No approach responds so directly to the interests and expectations of senior management, line managers, and shareholders. Training organizations fully aligned with corporate strategy and consistently delivering tangible value on every investment can inspire a great deal of peace and quiet.

*From In Action: Building Learning Capabilities through Outsourcing* by Merrill C. Anderson. Adapted with permission of American Society for Training & Development, Copyright ©2000.

---

**Edward Trolley is the Vice President of Outsourcing for KnowledgePlanet, a full-service, on-demand learning provider. Their content tools, learning technologies, methodologies, and reporting help organizations improve performance through training-on-demand. You can reach him at [etrolley@knowledgeplanet.com](mailto:etrolley@knowledgeplanet.com) or visit the website at [www.KnowledgePlanet.com](http://www.KnowledgePlanet.com).**