# Making the Case for Embedded Training (Mar 11)

By Susan Lesser

Military needs often drive innovation. The Internet, GPS, and digital photography are examples of recent advances originally designed for military purposes that have become such a part of our everyday lives that we cannot imagine being without them. Embedded training shares a similar history.

Originally conceived to train troops in the most expeditious and permanent method possible, embedded training now is being used with equal success in the business arena.

Often confused with on-the-job training (OJT), embedded training is implemented within a group setting, while OJT is performed on the basis of one trainer to one trainee. Embedded training provides instruction in one content area while the participants are working in another. For example, leadership development training can be embedded in a team that is working to create a new company website, compared to OJT, which provides training solely on the task at hand.

Employers are increasingly reluctant to take workers off the job for training. However, embedded training's benefits are numerous:

1. Embedded training eliminates the implementation gap by allowing for immediate application of the newly learned skills.

2. The transfer of training increases with embedded training because the practice is applied in the real world rather than merely theoretical.

3. For performance-centric organizations, embedded training is more affordable than stand-alone training as it does not require "time away from task," meaning that the training occurs within the normal scope of responsibilities.

4. Embedded training is effective whenever transferable skills are being taught, making it equally applicable to content matter as diverse as lean manufacturing and active listening skills.

For example, one of our clients embedded leadership development while working on its new five-year strategic plan. In addition to designing a plan that achieved 100 percent buy-in, senior management actively honed its skills in planning and receiving/offering productive feedback and mentoring.

5. Embedded training can be applied to a variety of organizational initiatives ranging from the development of a new website to strategy creation to budget negotiations. Another client embedded cause-and-effect diagrams and flow charting when meeting to orchestrate the rollout of its new brand.

6. Trust, a foundational element of any high-performing organization, is developed much quicker through the use of embedded training for the simple fact that trust is created through the sharing of experiences. The bond, and consequently the trust established, is more intense than that which would arise through more traditional training methodologies or workplace interactions. Embedded training allows for collective training and mutual growth while working toward a common goal.

Embedded training is highly effective when paired with a small amount of lecture-style training. That is because during embedded training, participants are taught using on-the-spot correction (OSC) methods. For this type of correction to be absorbed by all participants, a minimum level of content understanding is mandated.

For example: Communications training is embedded during strategic planning activity. Rather early on in the process, the trainer observes that "difficult" conversations are not being held, consequently stifling creation of a viable strategic plan. Accordingly, the trainer interrupts the meeting with a call for an OSC moment, during which she offers instruction on how to offer productive criticism.

At this point, if the trainees are not already up to speed in active listening and controlling emotional responses, the productive criticism lesson will be too advanced and will not yield the desired results. Therefore, it is imperative that the trainer understand, in advance, exactly what needs to be addressed during the embedded training sessions so she can offer a relatively small number of lecture/presentation training hours (ideally no more than four two-hour sessions) to those participants who do not already have the requisite knowledge.

Embedded training is not a panacea that will work at all times and with all content material; however, it strongly lends itself to teaching intangible skills such as leadership development, productive communication, and effective teamwork. Understanding and working with intangible skills in a classroom environment is relatively easy due to the controlled nature of the environment, and can lead to trainees acquiring a false sense of security with the material.

***The real challenge for trainees lies in the technique's implementation and their ability to deal with the unpredictable nature of the people with whom they ultimately will be utilizing these skills.*** Since embedded training occurs in the real world setting, all variables are present and training proceeds outside of a classroom. It may not advisable to use embedded training when the timeframe is short or the training participants are starting at distinctly different levels of competency.

Although the organization's HR trainer is most likely qualified to provide this sort of training, thought must be given to the potential for effectiveness of "an insider." Often, an outside consultant is brought in to provide objectivity and clarity to a situation, despite the fact that she may deliver the same message that other organizational members have communicated

However, it is also possible to have an in-house trainer who is so well respected that she will be able to remain free of politics while attending meetings to which she would not otherwise be invited and create OSC moments for individuals who are hierarchically both above and below her.

Regardless of whether you use an insider or an outsider, the key qualities to look for in your trainer are:

1. Active listener
2. Respectful of confidentiality
3. Unobtrusive (able to disappear during meetings at times when not training)
4. Objective and free of any political bonds
5. Flexible with time schedule (able to attend meetings at your organization's convenience, not the other way around).

According to the "Handbook of Human Performance Technology," there is a trend to move training as close as possible to the work situation, both to save time off the job and to increase the likelihood that the worker actually will use the new knowledge and skills. Embedded training removes the learning obstacle of theory's passivity when stripped of its context.

**About the Author:**

Susan Lesser is co-founder and partner of nPlusOne Consulting, an organizational management consulting firm located in West Hartford, CT. nPlusOne Consulting provides businesses with a measurable, innovative solution to help maximize the three most important organizational drivers—leadership, communication, and teamwork—to increase company profitability.

*Training Magazine Network,* ©2011 Lakewood Media Group