

# Increasing Training ROI Through Coaching

By Justin McCarthy

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The biggest challenge for both formal and informal training programmes is to ensure the application of new knowledge and skills in the workplace so that a return on investment is achieved.

According to research recently published by KnowledgeAdvisors, 76% of learners apply 50% or less of what they learn<sup>1</sup>. In any other part of the business, a scrap cost of 50% would be unacceptable, however there is little being done within organisations to reduce this cost and increase the application of learning. So how can this wastage be minimised and ROI on training improved?

Coaching is increasingly being seen as a solution. A frequently cited research paper by Olivero, Bane & Kopelmann<sup>2</sup> on the impact of coaching in a public services group reported that training alone resulted in a 22.4% improvement in performance. However, when the training was supported by coaching, the improvement in performance rose to 88%. This significant increase in performance can largely be attributed to four activities inherent in formal coaching:

## 1. Goal setting

Whilst effective training events will have clear learning objectives, these do not take account of individual learning needs and personal circumstances. It is also unusual for there to be a clear measure of success - for example, the question "how will you know that the course has been successful?" is rarely asked.

The identification and documentation of clear goals is one of the pillars of coaching, but this alone is not enough. The learner needs to understand why this goal is worthwhile and how it will benefit them personally. Having a specific, measurable outcome that is desired by the individual as well as the business has a major impact on the engagement of the learner.

## 2. Conscious Learning

In conscious learning, the learner is not only aware of *what* they are learning, but also *how* they are learning. As a result, the learner is able to identify which learning strategies are effective for them. For example, a learner may find that they benefit from talking through concepts with others to help them consolidate new ideas, or that they remember new information better when using images rather than notes.

The objective of conscious learning is not only to maximise the value of the immediate training, but to help the learner develop a personal learning strategy that influences future interventions. Creating and maintaining a state of conscious learning is facilitated by the coach, who uses a range of questioning techniques to develop strong self-awareness in the learner.

## 3. Planning

The ROI from a training investment comes from the application of the new knowledge, skills and behaviours. With 65% of managers not expecting any follow up action after a training event, it is not surprising that half of what is learned is not applied. Conscious learning can increase the acquisition and retention of knowledge and skills, however applying this in the workplace requires an additional strategy – forward planning. Specifically, planning the application of the new skills before any training actually takes place.

Agreeing an action plan prior to the training has two direct benefits - (i) a greater likelihood that the training is applied back in the workplace, and (ii) an increased engagement during the training itself.

The coaching approach requires that the action plan is defined by the learner, not the manager. In coaching terms, the manager defines the required business outcomes - the 'what', and the learner defines the action plan to achieve these – the 'how'. This, combined with a personal attachment to the goals, increases the commitment to follow-through.

#### 4. Reviewing

The fourth activity that coaching brings to a training programme is structured reviews. A review of progress against both the overall goals and the specific actions helps the learner celebrate successes and ensures that attention continues to be placed on applying the new skills. If managed correctly, the benefits of the training continue to grow over time.

A review immediately following the training event allows the learner to revisit the action plan and to assess how effective their learning strategy has been. In addition, research by Kettle & Häubl<sup>3</sup> demonstrated that anticipating rapid feedback on performance increased the actual performance of students by a "substantial magnitude". In the absence of a formal exam (e.g. certification) a planned review with a coach provides this feedback mechanism.

There are strong arguments for integrating coaching into learning and development programmes, but what about the cost?

Coaching will typically add 10% to the duration of a training event - a relatively small investment to achieve a fourfold increase in the effectiveness of the overall programme.

Training organisations continue to invest heavily in the content and delivery of formal training, yet the focus remains on the training event itself. If Learning and Development Managers want to make major improvements in training ROI, integrating coaching might be the best place to start.

#### **About the Author**

Justin McCarthy is an executive coach with Saxon Coaching, an organisation specialising in coaching programmes for managers and executives. For more information visit [www.saxoncoaching.co.uk](http://www.saxoncoaching.co.uk)

#### **References**

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<sup>1</sup> KnowledgeAdvisors Research (2010). Manager Engagement. *KnowledgeAdvisors, Inc*

<sup>2</sup> Olivero, Bane & Kopelmann (1997). Executive Coaching as a Transfer of Training Tool: Effects on Productivity in a Public Agency. *Public Personnel Management*

<sup>3</sup> Kettle, K. & Häubl, G. (2009). Motivation by Anticipation: Expecting Rapid Feedback Enhances Performance. *Association for Psychological Science*