

# Return on investment from training varies



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I once managed with a colleague who was a voracious reader. Wayne was a lifelong learner whose career exceeded that predicted by his formal education. He frequently carried around the latest book that he was reading.

But what made Wayne unique and especially valuable to our team was his curiosity and willingness to try applying his newfound knowledge to our business.

As a recovering engineer, I appreciated his quest for the practical application of knowledge. After completing a book, he would boil down the hundreds of pages into a couple of actionable items which he believed were appropriate to our plant. We would discuss these and, more often than not, define a small scale experiment to try them out. Many proved to be successful and thus became part of our standard way of doing things.

I thought of Wayne during the past month as I witnessed two clients do something similar following training workshops.

Let me start by saying that, as someone who spends a fair amount of working hours providing training, I'm acutely aware that the return on investment that organizations receive on training — and especially leader training — varies incredibly.

For some organizations the gain is immeasurable; for others it is unmeasurable because it is virtually non-existent.

Aware of that fact, I strive to boil workshops down to a vital few actionable bullets and provide useful application templates that will hopefully transform information into action.

In the first situation, I was presenting the "world premiere" of a workshop titled, "Meaningful Meetings." The creation of the workshop was requested by multiple clients — lousy meetings are a near epidemic.

Kicking off the workshop, the group of 15 participants estimated that the combined cost of their time wasted in meetings was \$115,000 annually. That got their attention.

The workshop defined two major responsibilities for meaningful meetings. First and foremost, facilitators have the responsibility to plan and conduct an effective meeting. During preparation they have to consider, develop and clearly communicate:

- Objectives.
- Scope (what's in and out-of-bounds).
- Participants.

- Required preparation.
- Agenda.

The second responsibility falls on the participants. Each person has to be the primary caretaker of his or her time. Therefore, before simply clicking the "Accept" button on a meeting invitation, participants can and should ensure that their participation is appropriate and that the facilitator has completed the necessary preparation so that their meeting time will be well spent.

At the conclusion of the workshops the senior leader (who also attended the workshop) challenged the members to agree on the actions they would take to use the training. They agreed to three:

- Pilot for one month attaching objectives, agenda and required preparation to all meeting invitations.
- Setting conference rooms as unique entities in Outlook (similar to participants) to ease scheduling and avoid double-booking rooms.
- Set default meeting times to 25 and 55 minutes to reduce the chances of line-to-line meetings and the associated waiting waste.

In the second instance, I completed a multiple-day leadership series covering a variety of topics with an intact leadership team. Once again, the senior leader (who also attended the series) shared his intent to meet with each participant individually to discuss which improvement topics were most appropriate for that manager and the specific plan to embody the principles learned into changed behaviors.

Training is expensive. The costs associated with the participants — both hard salaries, wages and benefits as well as opportunities lost

while attending — are typically the most significant, and often by far. It's more than reasonable to expect a return on that investment.

It's the leader's responsibility to ensure that expectation is understood, that a plan is in place and that the plan is carried out to fruition.

It's best to state that clear expectation prior to employees attending training, along with a "homework assignment" to report back on their plan to put the training to practical use. This increases the chances that attendees will approach the training like my old friend Wayne did his business books and decreases the odds that the new knowledge will be "Gone with the Wind."

## RICK SAYS

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