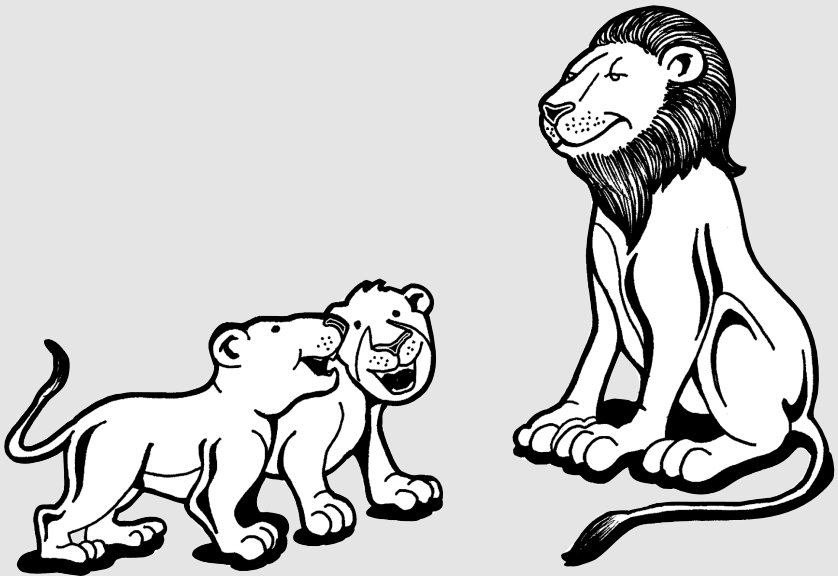
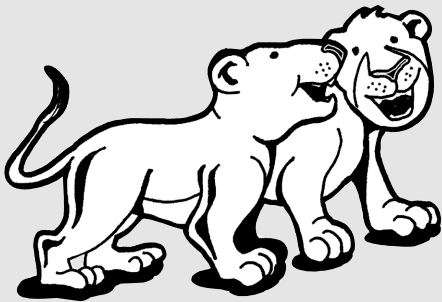


SECTION EIGHT

Supporting newly-trained staff





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This brief section is concerned with follow-up to training. Regrettably, there is no guarantee that learning gains achieved in a training program will produce positive results on the job. As discussed in the preceding chapter, evaluation can and should be conducted to assess the practical impact of training in the daily workplace. The fact is, however, this is hardly ever done. Research on this point has shown that all too often newly-trained staff members tend to slip back into old ways of doing their job. This will happen unless trainees make a serious commitment to changing their work behavior. For this reason, training planners need to consider ways of gaining this level of commitment when laying out their programs.

If changes in behavior do not take place after training, the organization's managers are likely to assume that the training program was a failure. However, as Kirkpatrick warns, we must be cautious not to immediately blame the training program in these cases. There can be many reasons for the lack of learning implementation, and most are unrelated to the training program.

Most observers think that a common—perhaps the most common—issue in instances where learning fails to be adopted on the job is the character of the work environment itself. Over time, an organization has a tendency to maintain its status quo. Generally speaking, people resist changes in their work routine. Even minor changes can be tremendously difficult to implement, even with the full support of management. If the newly-trained person needs to modify aspects of their working patterns in order to put their learning into practice, the cooperation of others may be required. Unless co-workers can be convinced of the value of these modifications, they will probably not be enthusiastic about participating in changes.

There can even be a hostile climate towards the particular changes that training intends to bring about. If a newly-trained staff member is thought to be gaining an advantage of some sort in the organization, either directly through their training or through changes that might follow from training, it will be seen as threatening by some colleagues. Of course if training is successful, learners are likely to be better equipped to advance their work and their careers, perhaps at the expense of their less well-trained peers. Under such conditions, opposition will almost certainly arise.

The influence of managers is crucial in activating the learning of participants. If they are disinterested, or worse if they are opposed, there can be little gained

from the training. Some clues on this issue may be found in the training needs analysis, although this cannot be depended upon. The only solution to such a problem may be to train the managers too, in order to gain their support. Indeed, we have frequently included both managers and their staff in training activities, just to alleviate problems of implementation in the workplace.

To overcome obstacles like these, a newly-trained person must be prepared in advance to counter workplace resistance. This can be done within the context of the course itself. A session on the obstacles to be expected on returning to their jobs might help participants think through their responses to opposition. If the trainer has knowledge of the particular job situations faced by their learners this can be an important asset. Once again, some hint of the reception likely to be faced by returning trainees can often be gleaned from the training needs analysis. If part of the problem found in TNA was the working environment, troubles can be expected.

We have found that even when we did not introduce a discussion on implementation issues, our participants have frequently raised the subject themselves, indicating their concern on such matters. Often this discussion begins with a learner's comment that goes something like this: "What we are learning here is good and I would like to employ these new techniques, but frankly speaking, they would never work in my organization." What the learner is saying is that they realize their organization's environment will not be conducive to put their new learning into action. When a discussion like this is initiated by a learner, the trainer should listen carefully and be prepared to talk through the issues thoroughly, perhaps in a discussion including the entire group of participants.

One technique that we have used with some success is to follow a discussion of workplace implementation problems with an exercise asking each participant to detail their specific plans for using new learning. In this exercise, learners can pick out which parts of their training will be most relevant to their job and explain how these will alter the way they do their work. Although participants may or may not actually act on these plans, the mere requirement of thinking through problems in their own work setting and then formulating a strategy may increase the likelihood of implementation. By having a plan like this in writing, most participants will feel some obligation to follow through on it.

References

Kirkpatrick, D.L. (1998). *Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels*. (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.