

Training Ain't Performance

By Harold D. Stolovitch and Erica J. Keeps

Yes. This is the title to one of our books. Beyond the title, however, resides a lot of science and sadness. Hardly anyone whom we speak to in organizations believes that training alone is the surest way to achieve worthwhile behavior changes and outcomes. Almost everyone in the learning and development world knows, through experience, that acquisition of skills and knowledge is rarely sufficient to attain sought-after results. Yet amazingly, we still find little evidence that this knowledge gets translated into systemic, performance improvement initiatives. Somehow, the training default solution gets triggered as convention, convenience and organizational criteria kick in. Who can argue that training is not good? Boxes need to get checked off. Form over function is a powerful approach for triggering entrenched organizational practices.

What follows is an excerpt from our book, [*Beyond Training Ain't Performance Fieldbook*](#). It speaks to this issue.

It Ain't Always Easy

Why is it so difficult to make happen what we know to be right? Several reasons.

1. **Knowing ain't doing.** How is it that we can be part of an ongoing event, fully be aware that something is wrong, and still play along? Here are two recent examples from our own experience:
 - **The scene:** Positronics (fictitious name), a high-tech company, is desperate to increase comprehensive solution sales. To this end it has launched marketing and sales for its new product, FlexGrowth. As a client company's needs change and grow, FlexGrowth adapts with them. The client pays only for what it needs, but Positronics builds in the potential to scale up, scale down, or move in any direction the client requires. Contracting for FlexGrowth doesn't just buy equipment and/or software, it buys for the client adaptive, flexible information technology infrastructure that seamlessly and effortlessly "flexes" with the needs of the client. It offers capacity and performance without unnecessary investment, and it includes strategizing with Positronics on an ongoing basis. It sounds great and can be financially worthwhile, but sales are unimpressive. The company concludes that more training for its sales force is needed.
The problem: In our investigations we discovered that the sales representatives were not very confident that the company could deliver as advertised. FlexGrowth was not directly integrated into their sales quotas and compensation. Customers weren't getting the concept. Competition had a sharper-edged approach. So what to do?
The proposed solution: After a lengthy survey pointing out all of

these problems, and others, management's decision, nevertheless, was to provide more training to the sales force, even though all of the sales teams had already been through several iterations of FlexGrowth training. It hadn't worked before, but conventional wisdom suggested that we try it again, this time with the admonition to "Do a better job. Make the training stick!"

- **The scene:** À la Mode is a retail boutique clothing chain positioned as a buyer's total clothing consultant: "You feel so at home with our clothing consultants that you'll want to return again and again." **The problem:** Repeat business is declining. Management has determined that the main reason is "lack of customer engagement" that should result in a complete quality experience. Whereas the company's proposed solution was training on quality customer engagement, our analysis clearly indicated that the concept of "quality customer engagement" was not universally understood. To some employees (even among management), it meant "a personalized, caring, empathetic, conversation during the sales transaction." To others it encompassed engagement from the moment a shopper entered the boutique until he or she left it. Another group viewed "customer engagement" as continuing beyond the time spent in the store (via phone calls, emails). Our investigations turned up customer concerns with what they perceived as restrictive sales promotions and a less advantageous frequent-buyer program compared with those of the competition. **The proposed solution:** Training on quality customer engagement gained consensus, even among the retailer's training team who had demonstrated in a workshop using hypothetical cases that they knew it was not the way to go.

It's oh-so difficult to apply what we know to what we do, often despite concrete data displayed before our very eyes. We may *know* that selected, default solutions will probably not work. Yet we fail to take the necessary steps to do something else.

2. **I don't know where to start.** Who are you and how did you get into your job? People in learning and development come from other fields. They were great at what they did. They communicated well. Suddenly, they are part of a new team, probably within the training or human resources development (HRD) group. The expectation seems to be that in your new role, you will impart what you know to others. So you train. But you see that training ain't performance. You hear other people suggest applying other interventions. But which ones? And how? Or maybe you are a training professional and you're good at it. How do you step beyond the training arena? How do you avoid traipsing into other professionals' territories (for example, human resources, organizational development, organizational effectiveness, or management)? Excellent questions. And

in both, or other, cases you may be wondering what gives you the right to step in and say “no” to what your supervisors or clients believe should be done. What’s your authority? Where do you begin? Once again, these are highly relevant questions and concerns.

To reassure you, many people have been faced with these same perplexing issues. The short answer to all of these questions is that you have one mission: to help your clients (the direct-contact people with whom you work) and your organization achieve results they value. The place to start is straightforward enough. Begin at the end. Draw out what the desired end result must be and work backwards to the current state of performance.

3. **Is this something I can do on my own?** Probably not alone. You can be a key driver and catalyst for transforming the organization from a training-fixated entity to one that understands the difference between virtuous activity and bottom-line results. And through your efforts, your insight and especially the data you gather, you will help build a team to make it happen.
4. **What do I do to bring others aboard?** By sharing ideas, cases and successes and by easing your colleagues and clients into a new mode of thinking, you gain allies. Your job is to gain credibility, trust, momentum, and demonstrable performance results. Your challenge – and, in a sense, your mission – is to demonstrate the value of this performance-not-just-training transformation to
 - your own managers, by achieving bottom-line results (such as higher payoff, lower costs, improved customer satisfaction)
 - your colleagues, by displaying greater impact, credibility, professional growth, and job satisfaction
 - your clients, by focusing on their issues in a rigorous, data-based manner that solves their problems in ways they value (for example, decreased error rates, increased productivity, rapid implementation of new systems, and decreased turnover)
 - your organization, by producing more thorough analyses and systemic, integrated solutions, and by achieving business objectives and goals complete with data-based evidence.

Use the tools in our *Fieldbook* with each of these populations in mind. As you experience successes, interest will grow and more people will hop aboard the performance train.