

Getting Managers Aboard The Trainers' Train

By Don Kirkpatrick, PhD



Boarding The Train

My wife, Fern and I recently took a train to St. Louis to visit our son, Jim and his wife, Wendy. It was a long trip with a transfer in Chicago. As we were traveling, I thought about the article I would write for the next issue of our Kirkpatrick newsletter. And I thought, "Wouldn't it be great if the managers who have trainees as their direct reports were on the train?"



And then I thought, also on the train should be upper management (the jury) who would approve or reduce the training department's proposed budget! I would set up a meeting with these managers to talk about how they can help us develop and evaluate our training programs.

Building Learner Motivation

When I was a Professor at the University of Wisconsin conducting training programs with supervisors and foremen, I often asked them the question, "What is your boss going to say to you when you return to the job?"

Most of them had no idea. One supervisor said, "I think my boss will tell me that I hope you had a good time, I am glad you are back, the work has piled up, and get to work." Several others agreed. But most of them didn't have a clue.

These responses prompted me to write a little booklet that I gave to the managers who sent their direct reports to our program. I told them that in order to get maximum benefit from their investment of time and money in the training program, they should do the following:



1. Sit down with training participants before the program. Tell them you are glad they are going to training. They should have a good time and learn what they can. And, when they come back, you are going to ask them what they learned, and how they can apply it to their job and any other jobs in the department.
2. Let the participants know that you would like them to give a summary of the experience to other foremen and supervisors when they get back to the job.

Can you imagine how this would motivate those attending to learn what they can? No one would like to go back after a three or five day program and say they didn't learn anything. And if they had to give a summary to other supervisors and foremen, just imagine how eager they would be to learn!

During the program, I suggested to participants that if their boss didn't ask for a report upon their return, they should initiate the discussion and offer suggestions to him or her.

By the way, I have suggested this to those attending my sessions at the ASTD national conferences and other programs and asked how many are doing something like this. Only a few raised their hands.

Building Management Ownership

Another suggestion for getting managers on board is to get their input regarding program content. This can take two approaches.

The first is to start with the jury and ask them what they expect from the training program, on Leadership, for example. Ask them to define what "success" of a program looks like. This will help the trainers decide what behaviors are needed and what knowledge and skills are needed to reach the results that the jury hopes we attain. We may have to negotiate a little if their expectations are unrealistic.

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The second approach is to ask the managers of the participants what subjects will help them to be more effective on the job. This may include such things as a better attitude toward their job, knowledge of principles of leadership, how to motivate employees, and skills in coaching.

This can be done easily by developing a list of possible subjects for the managers to rate on a three-point scale: Much needed; somewhat needed; not needed. These can be readily tabulated and considered by curriculum design professionals. And don't forget to make a category called "other" where they can write in other training topics they think are needed.



There is an underlying principle to what I have suggested. I learned it from a book by George Odiorne called "The Change Resisters." He said,

"To get people to accept what you are going to do, give them a feeling of ownership."

To get managers on board the trainers' train, get them involved so they have a feeling of ownership, and they will be more apt to accept what you are doing and help you do it.

References:

1. Kirkpatrick, Donald L. and James D., *Implementing the Four Levels*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco, CA 2007, Chapter 2.
2. Odiorne, George, *The Change Resisters*, Prentice Hall, New York, NY 1981

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