

Best Practices White Paper



Insights to help move
the performance needle

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Grow Revenue

Satisfy Customers

Create Leaders

Manage People

Optimize Projects

Measure Results



The Exact Expertise to
Ignite and Sustain Performance™

Training RAI™ and Raising the Bar through Assessments

By Tris Brown, President & CEO

Even in this climate of tightened belts and increased analysis, more than 90% of training initiatives continue to fail.

If that sounds surprising, try to remember the last training session that resulted in measurable and sustainable behavior change. Then try to remember a session that quantifiably impacted revenue, costs, or productivity. Does the fact that the great majority of training initiatives fail still seem so far fetched?

When we ask leaders about behavior change and impact related to training, we typically get a long pause and then a pensive and pained look. Then we usually get a long answer that would make many politicians proud for the lack of clarity and specifics.

Unfortunately, the training bar is still too low. Most people continue to consider training “successful” simply when participants get a few “Aha’s” and feel that it was not a waste of time. We can’t think of another business process that gets less scrutiny or has lower expectations than training. The training bar needs to be raised.

Q3 Poll



To help raise expectations and quality, our recent **Q3 Poll** highlights 4 critical success levers behind impactful learning initiatives and a positive **Training RAI™: Relevance.Adoption.Impact**.

1. **Strategic Business Link:** An urgent business relevance
2. **Skill Gap Assessment:** The strong understanding of individual skill gaps
3. **Performance Coaching and Support:** The consistent and timely performance coaching of participants by their bosses
4. **Training Measurement:** The impact on the business

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We define **Training RAI™** as a solution with 3 key characteristics.

1. **Relevance:** The solution needs to be relevant to the (1) Business, (2) Leadership, (3) Target Audience, and (4) Audience Supervisors. Without relevance, you would be better off buying books on the subject – you'll get the same result.
2. **Adoption:** The new skills, knowledge, and behaviors must be consistently adopted. Without on-the-job application, a disconnect will occur between learning objectives (skills and knowledge) and performance objectives (desired results).
3. **Impact:** The business impact needs to be measured. Contrary to popular belief, this can be done quickly and easily. Measurement is a key component to driving accountability for execution and providing actionable feedback for follow-on coaching. Read more about training measurement.

In this article, we will tackle one of the major impediments to obtaining a positive **Training RAI™**: **a Lack of Individual Skill Gap Assessments and Coaching Profiles.**

In our experience over the last 15 years, we have seen that the lack of proper individual training skill assessments and coaching plans causes a disproportionate amount of training failure. The majority of corporate learning initiatives continue to bypass individual skill assessments prior to designing or delivering new training programs. Skipping over the first step of assessing skill gaps is one of the root causes behind the 90%+ failure rate.

What if doctors prescribed the same medication and the same dosage to all patients before an individual diagnosis? Training practitioners who continue to sell, buy, and facilitate training with little regard to ensuring that the prescribed solution is the best fit for each participant could similarly be accused of “malpractice.”



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And even if you have diagnosed correctly, each participant has different strengths and weaknesses that need individualized attention before behavior can change and performance be improved. Not many problems get solved without a detailed, carefully considered plan.

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When asked, most training practitioners mistakenly identify attributes such as participant materials, length of program, location, facilitator personality, content, and instructional design as the culprits behind failed learning. If only it were that easy. Changing behavior is a process, not an event.

With the assumption that a clear and thorough business case must precede any individual skill assessment, this article outlines the top 6 assessment questions that you should ask to ensure a successful **Training RAI™**.

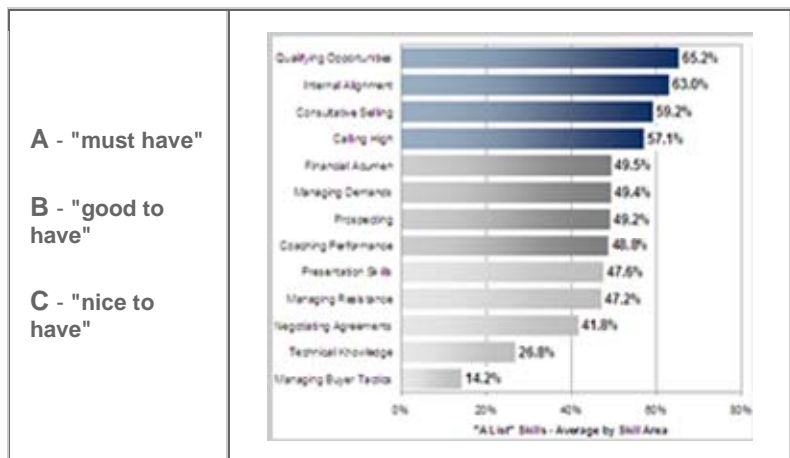
1. Does Leadership Agree Upon a Clear Direction?

While this seems like common sense, we continue to be surprised at how many seemingly experienced learning consultants and practitioners fail to answer two fundamental questions with key stakeholders before designing and implementing learning solutions:

1. **Barrier:** What are the skills that are holding us back from achieving our goals?
2. **Focus:** Where should we focus our efforts for the greatest impact?

An effective skill assessment should clearly identify the key “money making” skills for your initiative. You need to know the critical few “A,” “B,” and “C” skills and invest your resources and efforts accordingly.

For example, a recent client called us to help significantly increase revenue. This global technology company had seen revenue decrease consistently for the last 8 quarters. With other initiatives in place to focus on product quality, competitive positioning, and service, they wanted to significantly increase the capabilities and performance of their sales team.



After our initial meeting, it was clear that the President, SVP of Sales, VP of Sales, and Senior Account Reps all had different ideas about how to solve the problem based upon their past experiences. We knew that a lack of agreed-upon direction among the leadership team and supporting cast was a death knell for meeting their goal.

To clarify the direction to take, we designed and conducted an online assessment covering 93 key skills related to selling successfully in their industry. 10 specific skill areas and 35 “Must Have” skills rose to the top. The assessment and the accompanying process to align sales executives started the initiative off on the right foot.

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Alignment can also occur through interviews and focus groups; however, an assessment backed by (in this case) a research bank of 150+ proven behaviorally-based questions and scenarios provides a data-driven approach to ensure that your project is set up to succeed. A thorough approach also underlines the fact that you and your company are taking the initiative seriously. In this case, perception is indeed reality.

2. Are Leaders and Employees Aligned?

Once you have clear direction and executive alignment, your next step is to get your target and supporting audiences on the same page. This is accomplished by sharing the Leader Assessment results with the target audience and reviewing the 3 skill buckets:

- A – “must have”
- B – “good to have”
- C – “nice to have”

Necessary adjustments that increase focus and buy-in can then be made based upon input, discussion, and analysis. This alignment process is a critical step in achieving any behavior change.

3. Do You Know the Specific Skill Gaps of Your Target Audience?

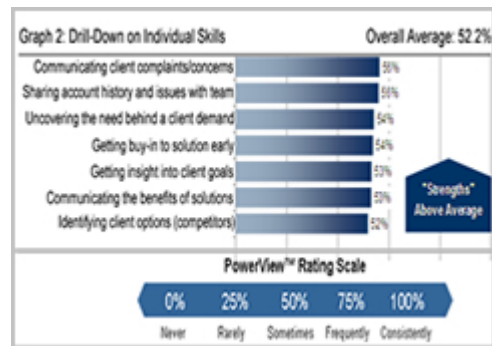
Once you have direction and alignment, it is time to pinpoint individual, group, and company skill gaps against a proven standard.

The skill assessment should be online, take approximately 20 minutes, and be based upon researched and behaviorally-based questions and scenarios that have been agreed upon by your key stakeholders.

The results will give you a clear picture of individual, group, and company:

- Strengths / Opportunities
- Differences between high and low performers
- Barriers to success
- Coaching / Development priorities
- Customization needs

With this detailed skill gap analysis, you have the data required to both plan and act intelligently. Remember, this is about creating **Training RAI™: Relevance.Adoption.Impact™**, not about learning for the sake of learning.



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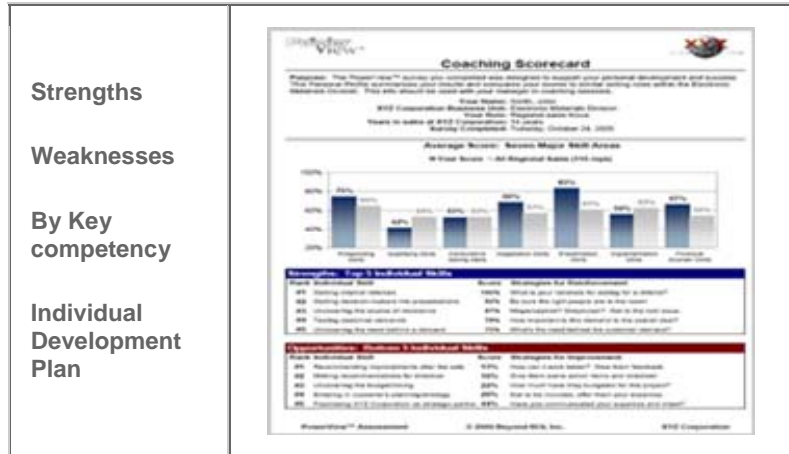


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4. Do Your Participants Have a Game Plan?

From a participant's perspective, it seems a little crazy to go into an important training program without a clear game plan. It is hard to improve your performance without knowing where you stand, what is expected of you, and what options you have at your disposal.

Customized profiles are excellent tools to help drive individual performance from the beginning.



5. Are Your Coaches Set Up to Succeed?

There is an incredible amount of data correlating the value of ongoing performance coaching, training, and behavior change. In a nut shell, if you do not coach your target audience, the majority of them will not change their behavior. Without behavior change, you will not get the performance or business results that you desire. Without the results that you desire, you would be better off buying participants books, saving your money, or going golfing.

Training, by itself, is typically a waste of both time and money.

The same data that is used to provide participants with a game plan should also be used to create a targeted and individualized coaching plan with their supervisor. The amount of involvement and support from the learner's manager has direct impact upon their success.

In fact a recent study at a Fortune 500 Financial Services comparing a "Coached Group" vs. "Non-Coached Control Group" showed:

- ***20.3% higher overall skill scores for the coached group***
- ***5.9% to 65.6% higher individual skill scores for ALL 38 skills***
- ***10% net increase in skill levels pre/post compared to control group***
- ***3 times the skill improvement attributed directly to their manager***
- ***2 times the success story results attributed directly to coaching***

Additionally, of the 61 participants who received individual coaching, 9 out of 10 improved their scores in the critical areas measured. Of the 47 participants who did NOT receive coaching, their scores decreased in 9 out of 10 areas measured.

This is not a fluke. It has been proven repeatedly that in order to change behavior and performance results you need two things:

1. **Plan & Action:** A plan and immediate action to begin applying new skills on the job
2. **Manager Coaching:** Involvement and support from the learner's manager

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6. Are You Serious About Getting Results?

If the outcomes are important to you, important to the participants, important to their boss, and important to the company, then you owe it to yourself to do it right.

That means treating your learning initiative as a process, not an event. That means investing in accordance with the results that you desire. That means ensuring that in addition to the 6 steps outlined above, you use an assessment process to also:

- **Urgency:** Create a sense of urgency and creative tension to get people engaged
- **Kickoff:** Initiate the change process and predispose participants to get the ball rolling
- **Exactness:** Customize the training to ensure that it is exactly what you need
- **Baseline:** Set baseline metrics against which to measure improvement
- **Buy-In:** Obtain buy-in right from the start

In Conclusion

While many assessments on the market today are statistically invalid and often implemented in a way that inhibits trust, decreases relevance, and wastes time, we believe that the assessment process is an invaluable tool to drive true behavior change and positive results.

Interviews, focus groups, and best practices can provide interesting data points to help ensure that your training design is on target. They are key elements to a successful solution. However, the assessment process, combined with an individual coaching plan, allows you to provide both the participant and the coach the tools required for **sustainable** success.

So the next time you have an important business issue related to skill or knowledge gaps, be sure you can answer “yes” to the following 6 questions before you jump to or initiate a solution. Only then can you be assured that you are on the right path to the success that you seek.

1. Does Leadership Agree Upon a Clear Direction?
2. Are Leaders and Employees Aligned?
3. Do You Know the Specific Skill Gaps of Your Target Audience?
4. Do Your Participants Have a Game Plan?
5. Are Your Coaches Set Up to Succeed?
6. Are You Serious About Getting Results?

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We help make companies more competitive through people.

Founded in 1995 on the principle that training "by itself" will not drive tangible change or business results, we work with a select group of clients to get the most out of their people. Every training and consulting solution we provide increases revenue, decreases costs, or raises productivity.

Who we work with

Our clients are typically mid-market business leaders who believe that investing in people is vital to their success. The majority come from the high-tech, life-sciences, and service industries and often lack the internal resources or expertise to get the job done. They want more than what traditional training and consulting approaches can deliver.

What we do

We get results. Our one-stop-shop offerings range from creating a high performance culture, to outsourcing the training function, to designing and delivering targeted learning solutions. We excel in seven key practice areas: assessment, sales, loyalty, leadership, management, project management, and measurement.

How we do it

We partner with our clients in a way that makes sense for their unique situation. First we identify the key metrics they want to improve. Then we assemble a dedicated team of experts who have successfully solved similar problems with similar clients. Our expertise and flexibility allow us to move the performance needle faster and farther than anyone else in our industry.

Our Guarantee

We are fiercely devoted to the success of our clients and guarantee results.



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Our clients tells us that we are different.

Our clients tell us that we save them both time and money. Our clients tell us that they appreciate access to certified best-in-class experts who help them to move the needle.

Our sales clients

confirm that they have grown sales by 40%, increased units sold by 42%, increased average pricing by 12%, and closed over 50% of their pipeline.

Our customer loyalty clients

confirm that their customer revenue per household increased by 18%, repeat calls decreased by 48.4%, single contact resolution increased by 6.1% and their overall customer satisfaction increased by 10%.

Our leadership and management clients

decrease their costs by up to 50%, increase speed-to-productivity by 60%, accelerate promotions by 20%, decrease unwanted attrition by up to 40%, and report an additional \$13m to their bottom-line.

Our project management clients

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Representative Clients

We are fiercely devoted to the success of our clients and proud that over 85% of our business comes from repeat business with satisfied clients.



97.5% client satisfaction

98.2% recommend LSA

98% solution satisfaction

129% knowledge gain

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100+ Client Testimonials

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