



GETTING MORE FROM YOUR INVESTMENT IN TRAINING:
THE 5As FRAMEWORK

STEPHEN J. GILL & SEAN P. MURRAY

COPYRIGHT 2009 BY STEPHEN J. GILL & SEAN P. MURRAY
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. EXCEPT AS PERMITTED UNDER
THE U.S. COPYRIGHT ACT OF 1976, NO PART OF THIS
PUBLICATION MAY BE REPRODUCED, DISTRIBUTED, OR
TRANSMITTED IN ANY FORM OR BY ANY MEANS, OR STORED
IN A DATABASE OR RETRIEVAL SYSTEM, WITHOUT THE PRIOR
WRITTEN PERMISSION OF THE PUBLISHER.

REALTIME PERFORMANCE
603 STEWART STREET, SUITE 500
SEATTLE, WA 98101
PHONE: 206.749.9000

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT WWW.REALTIMEPERFORMANCE.COM

FIRST eBOOK EDITION: AUGUST 2009

ISBN: 978-0-615-31300-9

Chapter 1: The Opportunity | 5

Chapter 2: Organizational Factors | 12

Chapter 3: Alignment | 25

Chapter 4: Anticipation | 35

Chapter 5: Alliance | 44

Chapter 6: Application | 55

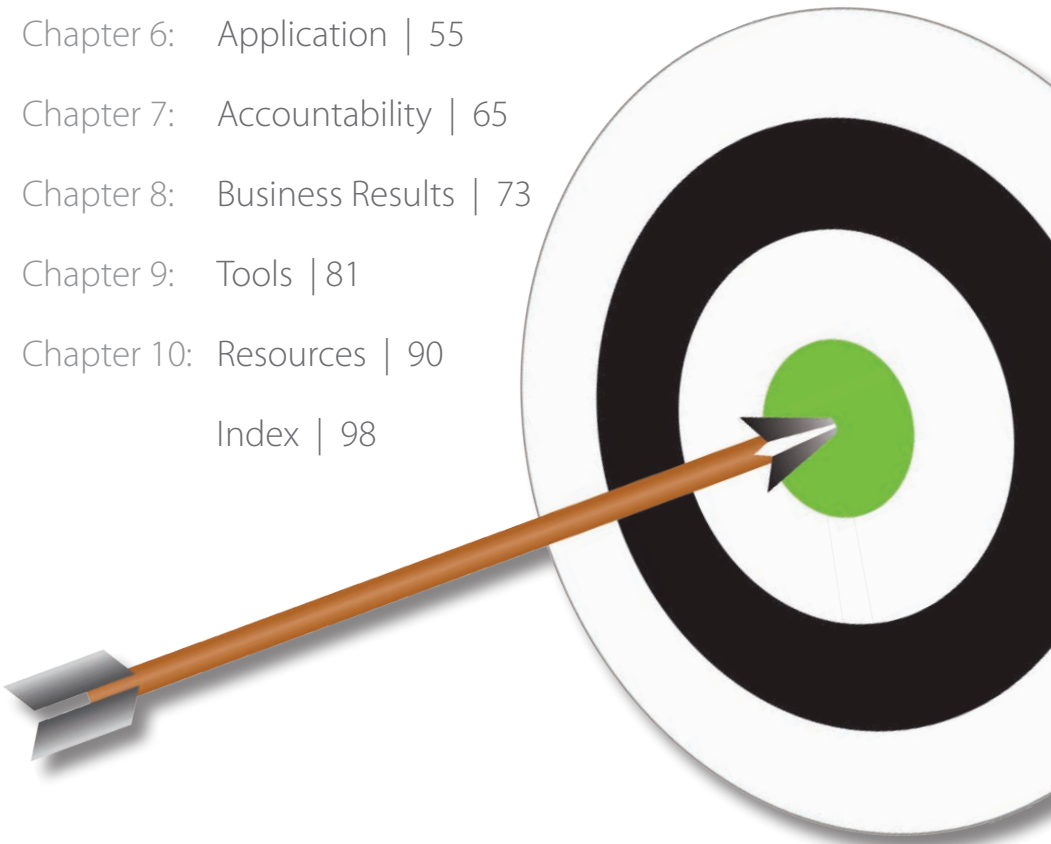
Chapter 7: Accountability | 65

Chapter 8: Business Results | 73

Chapter 9: Tools | 81

Chapter 10: Resources | 90

Index | 98



Contents.

“

Key leaders in business are in real need of a model – a roadmap – to guide effective employee development. The 5A's Framework by Steve Gill and Sean Murray offers a simple, yet comprehensive description of the factors that lead to a learning culture. By not recognizing the impact of culture on learning, employee development will fail. Organizations and people applying this framework will take the needed steps to ensure that their training investments will produce desired business results.

”

Winsor Jenkins, VP – Human Resources, Northwest Pipe Company
and author, *The Collaborator: Discover Soccer as a Metaphor for Global Business Leadership*



The Opportunity.

1

Companies are not getting the **desired performance improvement** from their investment in learning interventions.

The Opportunity

U.S. companies spend \$134

billion annually on employee learning and development

programs. If you were to interview, as we have,

participants who

have attended these

programs, generally you would find they have a

good time, enjoy meeting

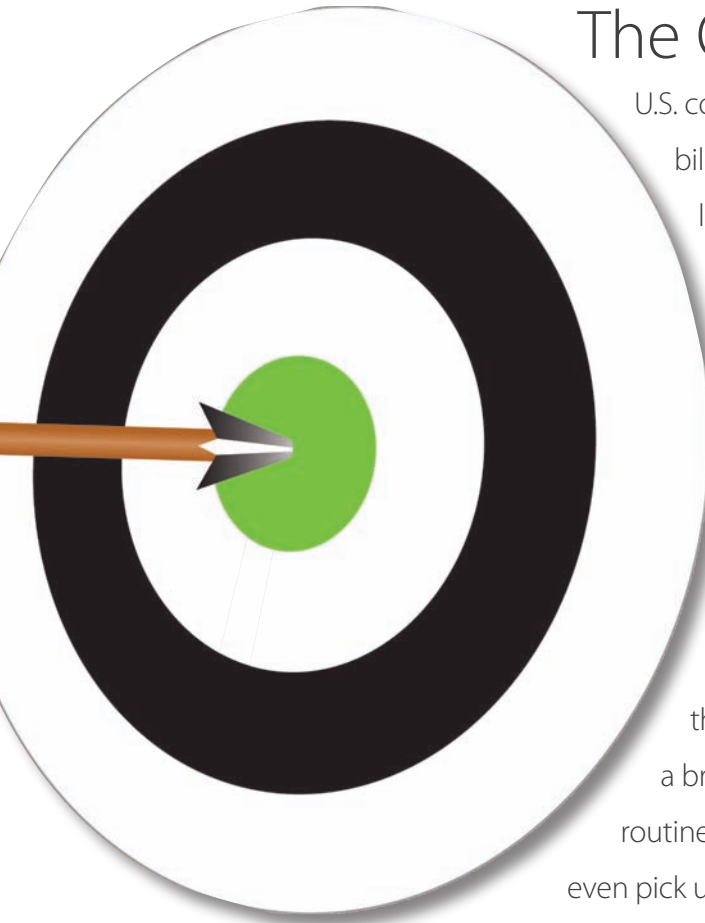
people from throughout

the company, and appreciate

a break from the normal

routine. Many of these participants

even pick up new skills and knowledge




and, when pressed, will claim their experience was valuable and worthwhile. However, if you dig deeper, you will discover very few participants apply their learning to achieving important business goals.



The average number of employees who apply what they learned to achieving business results is between 10% and 20% of participants in training programs.

In fact, research studies peg the average number of employees who apply what they learned to achieving business results at between 10% and 20% of participants in training programs. This means that 80% to 90% of participants are not applying the training in any significant way. If companies invested in training with the same rigor and analysis they apply to investing in equipment and software, there would be dozens of MBAs crawling through every training department in search of inefficiencies. Can you imagine, in this day and age, a manufacturing plant with a quality defect rate of 80%? But that is exactly the level of “quality” most organizations accept today in their training programs.

Missed Opportunity



If you talk with the 10% to 20% of managers who actually apply what they learned, you will find they often get tremendous results. One sales manager we interviewed who attended a relationship-selling workshop attributed newly-learned skills to closing a \$15 million office systems deal with one of his customers. Consider, for a moment, that the relationship-selling course included nine other participants, each with territories and accounts similar in size to that of the successful sales rep. If everyone in the course was able to apply the new relationship selling skills to close a \$15 million dollar deal, then at least theoretically, this company would generate an additional \$135 million in revenue.

One Learner
Successfully
Applied
New Skills

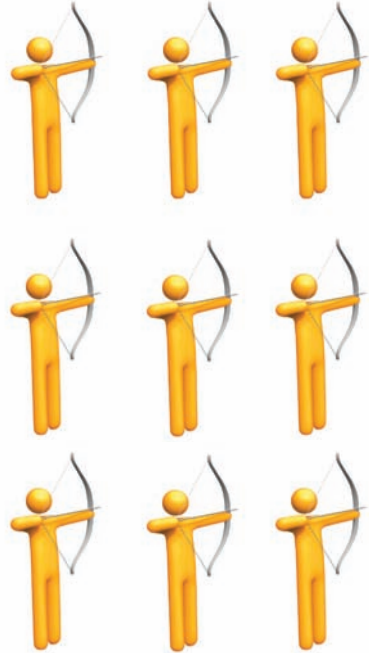


Result:
Closed an additional sale

Value to the
organization:

\$15 million

9 Learners
Were Unable to
Successfully Apply
New Skills



Result:
No measurable benefit to
the organization

Value of missed
opportunity:

\$135 million

If you are skeptical of this \$135 million missed opportunity, assume for a moment that it is off by 10x. That is, the true missed opportunity here is closer to \$13.5 million. Does that not still warrant further investigation and beg the questions: What about all of the other sales managers who could be getting that kind of result and are not? Were they not at the same training? Did they not experience the same quality learning event? What is preventing these learners from applying their new skills to achieve business results?



In most cases, organizational factors are the barriers to learning and change, not poor instructional design.

Organizational Factors

When trying to determine why learners are not successfully applying what they learn, training departments often turn to the training event itself. We have all heard excuses about mediocre facilitators, poorly designed content and useless exercises. However, from our research, most participants find today's learning events highly engaging and educational. When we ask learners what

is preventing them from being successful, most point to organizational factors that reside largely outside of the classroom.

In this book we explain why organizations are failing to get the most they can from training and what they can do to fix the problem. And, we tell you from research and our own experience how to optimize your investment in training programs.



Organizational Factors.

2

Organizational Factors

The following real-life case studies highlight the important role organizational factors play in helping or preventing an employee from applying new skills toward achieving business goals.



"I told my boss the program was about how to get teamwork between departments. He said that he's tried that and it doesn't work here."

—Sam

Sam's Story

Sam is a Systems Engineering Manager for a technology services company. He has been with the company for seven years and has eight systems engineers reporting to him within the mid-range commercial business group. His boss nominated Sam to attend the company's New Leader Development Program. Sam's boss didn't say much about his reasons, other than that this was a course



"I liked the leadership program. It was great finally meeting people from other parts of the company. But I can't say anything has changed."

-Sam

that Sam hadn't attended yet and it looked like an opportunity for Sam to "sharpen" his leadership skills. Sam showed up at the first day of a three-day off-site workshop without a clear understanding of the purpose of the program and what he was supposed to learn and do differently. However, the facilitator was especially engaging and Sam had a "terrific experience." He met many new people from other functions and business units, and felt that he "learned a lot." At the end of the third day, Sam gave the workshop the highest rating on the evaluation questionnaire.

Immediately upon returning to his office, Sam told his boss about how the workshop emphasized the value of cross-functional teamwork. Sam's boss responded by warning him that trying to collaborate with the Marketing and Sales groups would be a waste of time. Sam's boss pessimistically stated that those departments don't understand systems engineering—and furthermore, his previous attempts at collaboration with Sales and Marketing had failed. After that remark, Sam didn't try to apply any of the content from the New Leader Development Program.



"I've been having some trouble with a couple people on my team. My boss said she hoped I would learn some ways to relate better to them and, possibly, not have to fire them. I agreed that this would be a good goal for me."

-Carla

When interviewed about the program six months later, Sam could not recall anything that he had done differently since participating in the Program that had contributed to enhanced business results for his business unit or for the company.

Carla's Story

Carla is the shift supervisor for a call center at a large hotel. She supervises three to four people each shift. In many cases, Carla and her employees are the first people to have contact with the property's guests. Carla was asked to attend the company's new three-day diversity workshop. Before going to the program, Carla met with her boss, who had already participated in the workshop, to discuss how the experience could benefit Carla, her team, and the hotel. Together, they identified some goals and outcomes that would contribute to their success.

The workshop was a powerful, life-changing experience for Carla. She discovered some blind-spots in her treatment of others. After the workshop, she met with her boss again and they



"I learned to listen before making a judgment, and a better way of giving feedback. After the workshop, I met with the problem employees and everything went much better."

-Carla

talked about applying what Carla had learned in the workshop to making her team more effective. These goals were made part of Carla's performance review. One example of learning was Carla's interaction with an employee who had a "smart mouth" and a "bad attitude" talking to guests on the phone. Before attending the diversity workshop, Carla was on the verge of firing this employee. After the workshop, Carla agreed with her boss to change her approach and give the employee another chance. She met with the employee, praised her first for the things she had done right, gave her feedback, and then asked her about what kind of help she needed. The employee confided in her saying, "I learn differently than other people." Carla discovered that all of the bravado and "over-talking" was the employee's way of compensating for her difficulties. Once this came out, Carla was able to figure out how to help this employee become successful. Now they work well together and the employee has become one of Carla's best operators. Carla successfully retained a valuable employee.



Conditions outside of the learning event determine the impact on business results.


Beyond Training

Sam and Carla are examples of how organizational factors affect the impact of training. In terms of content and process, the New Leader Development Program attended by Sam and the Diversity Workshop attended by Carla were both exceptional programs. Each event met the highest standards for adult learning. The programs had clear, meaningful goals, interactive and engaging facilitation, opportunities for participants to share individual experiences, and small team interaction to build interest and commitment. These learning events received very high ratings from participants. Even so, our stories of Sam and Carla show how factors beyond the workshop made all the difference. Sam was unable to achieve any significant business results while Carla applied her new skills to retain a valuable employee.

When we ask managers why relatively few people are showing evidence of success from training, they mention conditions outside of the learning event, such as:

- Senior management does not understand the value of training.
- Our training department is not involved in strategic business planning.
- Our training budget has been cut severely.
- Employees are not learning what they need to learn to be successful.
- Training programs are isolated events with little follow-up.
- Employees are not given the opportunity to apply everything they learn in training.
- We don't have a way of measuring the extent to which training is having a positive impact on our organization.

Before, During, and After Learning Interventions



We have evaluated the results of some of the best leadership development, business acumen, team building, and supervision skills programs in the field and it is always the same. Unless something is done before, during, and after the program to support learning and its application, there is very little impact on the bottom-line of a business. What we are suggesting here goes way beyond a little pre-training information packet and post-training reflection. Organizations must confront all of the factors that prevent learning from contributing to business success.

Adults do not learn in a vacuum. They need to believe that they can improve and they need to believe that what is being



Organizations must confront all of the factors that prevent learning from contributing to business success.

taught will be useful to them. They need to care about the knowledge and skills they are learning. They need to practice what they've learned soon after being exposed to the new material, and do this in an environment where they won't be criticized for being less than perfect. They need to apply the knowledge and skills to meaningful work. They need feedback. They need to feel recognized for what they have learned. And finally, they need to see meaningful results from their actions.

Imagine taking a golf lesson without being committed to improving your golf game. Or imagine not picking up a club again for months after the lesson, or, when you do play again, not keeping score and not having anyone observe your game and give you feedback. It's unlikely you would improve your game very much. You might remember a few things from the lesson that could help your game, but you would not be maximizing the value of the lesson. You would probably be better off skipping the

lesson altogether and avoiding the frustration. Even if Tiger Woods was the instructor, you wouldn't learn very much.

However, this is what managers are often asked to do. They are asked to attend leadership training and development programs with little preparation, little support, minimal practice, no follow-up, and no feedback. And then the program is blamed for not bringing about the change that is needed.

Too often managers find themselves being parachuted into an instructional drop-zone. All of a sudden they are tapped to attend the latest and greatest training. Without preparation and without a plan for follow-up and follow-through, they are told to go to "Lean Manufacturing", "Seven Habits",



“Good to Great,” “Customer Loyalty,” “One Minute Manager,” or some other “hot” program. Most “hot” programs offer useful content that would benefit anyone, but they are wasted efforts if the other key elements of learning are not in place.

That is why these programs go from “hot” to “cold” so quickly, which causes the program-of-the-month phenomenon in organizations. Employees attend and maybe they enjoy the experience (especially if held at an attractive location) and, in the short term, report that the program was beneficial and they liked talking with the other participants. Then, over time, their behavior and, more importantly, organizational performance do not improve. Still wanting change, executives and the HR Department begin to look for the “next big thing.”

Companies today can no longer afford to rely on these isolated events to make a difference, whether a one-day skill-building workshop, or a year-long leadership development institute. Maybe there was a time when companies could offer these events to employees without concern for results. Today, resources are too precious. You must make sure that you are maximizing the impact from every performance intervention.

Wanted: A Learning Culture

This means that rather than a culture of events, you need a culture of learning, one that supports ongoing learning throughout your organization.

In a learning culture, the normal behaviors, customs, expectations, and goals are all oriented towards learning and performance improvement. After conducting hundreds of studies of the impact of performance improvement programs, we have concluded that to create and maintain this culture, five factors must be present:

Alignment
Anticipation
Alliance
Application
Accountability

We call these factors the 5A's and we explore them further in each of the next five chapters.



The Five Key Organizational Factors that Lead to Business Success from Training

1 Alignment

Align learning with strategic goals.

2 Anticipation

Anticipate success.

3 Alliance

Create a learning alliance between learner and boss.

4 Application

Apply learning immediately.

5 Accountability

Hold learner and organization accountable for business results.

