

## How to... Maximise Transfer of Learning

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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*I'm Too Busy...*

*There's Not Enough Time...*

*My Workload Is Too Heavy...*

"Work is like a conveyor belt and going on a training course is like stepping off for a bit. As soon as you return to work, you are straight back on the conveyor belt with no gaps to implement your action plan."

This conveyor belt image came from a participant in a recent survey carried out by the authors where the most commonly perceived organisational hindrances to transfer of learning were issues of time/workload (58.3%), followed by training structure/system (25%) and poor management (10.4%).

Perhaps it is true that there is 'never enough time to do everything' but people find time to do what they want to do. If learning becomes a priority to the individual, they will find time. If "lack of time" and "pressure of workload" continue to be used as template excuses for not transferring learning, the utopia of the 'learning organisation' moves further and further away; not to mention the cost in terms of time and money wasted on learning interventions that fail to lead to changes in behaviour, capability and attitude.

The following Seven Step Plan applies to any significant learning event (eg training courses, e-learning, coaching, books/videos etc.)

### **1) Create a Learning Culture**

- To embed an organisation wide improvement in transfer of learning, there may need to be a 'learning culture' drive where 'striving to be a learning organisation' becomes part of the organisations identity. 'Learning = priority' needs to become part of the value/mission statements. One respondent in the author's survey looked forward to

“a culture where a trainee’s team expect training to effect real change and welcome this – to see training of an individual as a benefit to the whole team.”

- Brand the process internally. Give it a name and a logo, for example ‘Learning Matters’ or use pre-existing brands eg. ‘Lifelong Learning’.

## **2) Give Structured Guidance to Managers and Staff**

- A learning event needs to be seen as part of a process rather than a solution in and of itself. Learning events are necessary but not sufficient on their own.
- Write a guide for staff and managers informing them what to do, how, when and why. This needs to cover the pre, during and post learning event. Train/brief managers & staff about the process and the expectations.

## **3) Require Pre-Event Preparation**

- Help the manager and individual to identify learning needs. Needs can be explicit (i.e. obvious – “I need to improve my time management skills”) or implied (i.e. yet to be revealed – “I keep missing deadline and turning up late for meetings”).
- Provide clear learning event outlines with objectives and content so both the individual and manager understand what the event entails and contains.
- As a general principle, involve managers but avoid putting them completely in charge of their team’s learning development. Empower individuals to apply for learning events themselves, perhaps with their manager’s sign off.
- Make pre-learning event questionnaires a prerequisite to significant learning events. Ask questions that establish development areas, perceived needs, current experience of the subject and how do they intend to integrate the learning back into their workplace/ work plan? The individual needs to set time aside to fill in the questionnaire and then have a meeting with the manager to discuss needs and expectations. The questionnaire then needs to be returned to the Learning and Development (L&D) Department.
- A specific time needs to be diarised for a follow-up meeting (to take place within two weeks after the learning event) between the individual and their manager.

## **4) Provide Effective Learning Events**

- Learning events need to be:
  - ☑ Practical - although theory is interesting for some, practical learning with ‘how to’ ideas are more likely to be transferred.
  - ☑ Relevant – for the learning to have any meaning there must be a context that the learner can relate the concepts back to.
  - ☑ Ordered logically – this applies to the order of the events themselves, and also the actual content of the events.
- The design and context of the event can be tailored with the use of the pre event questionnaires. This links the learner’s needs directly to the learning event and makes the most of the questionnaires.

### **5) Set Up A Formal Follow-up System:**

- Encourage the individual to read through their notes, action plans and pre-learning event questionnaire before meeting with their manager for a post event review to discuss eg. What did you learn from the event (knowledge)? What will you do differently as a result? What resources (realistically) do you need to put your action plan into place?
- After a significant learning event, eg. training courses, provide a post course questionnaire. When this is completed and a copy returned to the L&D Department, an attendance certificate can then be sent to the individual. The information from these questionnaires could be compiled (eg. on the intranet) so people considering the event can see what others have gained.
- Allow for feedback between the individual, manager and L&D department in case further support is needed. Does the new learning challenge existing processes and systems? Is a bigger change needed? How far can we take this before we need involvement from elsewhere? Might the new learning require 'double-loop' learning (i.e. a change in the system as well as a change in behaviour)?

### **6) Encourage a Support System**

- Set up a 'buddy system' where individuals can contact others who were on the learning event. This could involve meetings, peer support groups and prompts.
- Consider two part learning events with a peer review in part two
- Encourage individuals to brief their team on key points (eg. at a team meeting), or mentor other individuals about topics covered during the event. Remember, the best way to fully learn something is to teach someone else.

### **7) Evaluate Longer Term**

- Contact individuals one to three months after the learning event... "These were your aims – how are you getting on? What are you putting into practice?"
- Evaluate managers (eg. at appraisals) as to how well they are facilitating the development of their staff.

Joe Cheal & Heather Giles

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## Top Tips for Individual Transfer of Learning

- Take responsibility for your own learning. It's too easy to blame others. Make learning a priority for yourself.
- Before attending the event, block time out in your diary for when you return. Then use this set aside time to reflect on what you learnt and plan how you will integrate the learning.
- Discuss what you learnt with others. The best way to learn something is to teach it to someone else.
- Stay in touch with others from the event, keep the ideas alive.
- If it is not forthcoming, ask for a meeting with your manager to discuss what you want to improve and how.
- Add any action plans to your work objectives and plan.
- Take action on the ideas that made immediate sense as soon after the event as possible. Create opportunities, put actions on your to-do list and schedule them into your diary.
- Reread key notes from the event, especially any ideas that you wrote down yourself. File your notes where you can find them!
- Before going into new situations, reflect on any ideas/techniques you learnt on the event that may help you.