

## How to avoid training mistakes

By Bob 'Idea Man' Hooley, AS

As a meeting planner, you make decisions to engage or contract on programs and policies that will either help your team or hinder your team in reaching their goals. Unfortunately, training dollars can ultimately be wasted because some leaders make the following mistakes.

Meeting planners can avoid making training mistakes by considering these ideas, and side stepping some mistakes that have minimized returns on their training dollars.

**Failing to fully assess team needs.** Perhaps you are teaching your team skills they already have? Team members don't need training 'just for the sake of training.' I've heard managers say, "Even if they know this stuff - a refresher won't hurt them?" Sometimes that is true (I've been asked back to reinforce a program or to provide add-on sessions)- but often it can be counter-productive or demotivating, if not handled correctly.

**Here's a suggestion:** before you launch any training program, conduct a needs assessment with your team. Work to establish a comprehensive list of current team member's skills. This way you may discover what they already know, and what they need (and hopefully want) to learn. Then, as you provide training it will send a positive message that you value their contributions, and are dedicated to helping them increase and hone their skills.

**Thinking (wishfully) that training sessions will eliminate conflict.** Often managers think that training, especially training that focuses on team or relationship building, will help eliminate conflict on the job. Some programs over emphasize 'teamwork' at the expense of **team effectiveness**. All team efforts need to be focused and task and relationship oriented. When the sessions focus too much on relationship building vs. team effectiveness they lose impact, and can often become counter-productive.

**Here's a suggestion:** work to ensure everyone on your team knows that conflict is an important part of the team process. Without some conflict and honest difference of opinion you get mediocrity; as someone once told me "the opposite of conflict is apathy, not peace and harmony." The secret is in not taking conflict as a personal issue, or a negative result in the process. Creative conflict can be a part of a positive process in making sure your team makes the best choice and fully explores all the options and potential pitfalls.

**Thinking of training as a program vs. a process.** One of the challenges in training is the expectation that a half-day, full day or even a few days of training can change years of habit. Research shows that shorter sessions spread over a longer time result in better retention and long range effectiveness. Short and often rather than a one-time massive attack seems to work.

**Here's a suggestion:** for your training to be effective, insights and ideas gained must be quickly translated into action (Ideas At Work) - actions that are reinforced by the leaders on your team. Real development is never completed, as is the true essence of education. In my sessions, I challenge my audience members to make a commitment to act on what they learn, and to schedule those actions. This has helped anchor their training in a short time period.

I hope these suggestions will help you as you search out the most effective training programs for your team. I'd be happy to share some other thoughts with you if you have any other questions or queries.

How about other ideas or past mistakes that can be shared as lessons learned?

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I'd be happy to hear of any lessons you've learned and will include in a future version. Drop me a note at: [bob@ideaman.net](mailto:bob@ideaman.net)

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