

Getting the most from your learning

Helena Clayton, Director of Open Programmes



Times have changed. If you were to ask a manager ten years ago, about the programme they were attending in the coming weeks – the best you could hope for was that they had the date in their diary

and knew what it was called. Preparation was simply all about turning up at the right place at the right time and the output was an impressive folder full of paper sitting on their shelf back in the office.

In today's workplace where training budgets are reducing, the emphasis is on proving that organisations are getting real value for money out of the programmes their managers are attending. One way of achieving this is to demonstrate the difference the learning has had on the participant's behaviour back in the workplace and its effect on the organisation's performance. The holy grail of training evaluation is to prove a direct link between a programme and the organisation's bottom line – whilst this may still be difficult or even impossible, here are some tips you can follow that will ensure your learning starts before the programme and, continues long beyond it thus benefiting your organisation in the long term.

Personal reflection

Prior to attending, it is important to take time out to reflect on your strengths and identify your development areas in the subject area of the programme you are attending. Look back

over recent events and review them. Examine the role that you played – what was successful and what you would do differently? From there you can start to consider what you want to achieve as a result of attending the programme. Consider starting a learning diary which is a great opportunity for self-analysis since it provides the chance to reflect on difficulties and achievements. The diary can be continuous, i.e. completed every day for a particular period, or limited to a course or a project. They help to conceptualise thoughts but can also highlight whether you are spending time on the right things or getting drawn into daily fire fighting.

Feedback

Feedback is one of the greatest tools available as it provides us with valuable information on our impact on others and our performance. Consider getting some feedback from others about how they experience you in the area covered by the programme. Remember to choose not just your line manager but also the people around you so that you get a full picture of how you are perceived within your organisation.

Talking to your line manager

In most cases, your line manager will have to approve the budget for your programme so they have a vested interest in making sure they reap the benefits from your learning. Spend some time with them, ask what their expectations are, how they want you to implement the learning after the programme. After the programme, meet with them again to discuss how the programme went, agree any actions and consider further learning opportunities.

Research

Read journals, newspapers and leadership/management publications to keep up to date with latest ideas and issues. Use the internet, for example if you are attending a leadership programme, "google" leadership and see what the current issues are or identify current leaders from your organisation or in the media whose style appeals to you and think about why.

Action plans and personal commitments

Take time at the end of your programme to set down some development goals. Committing this to paper, or talking to another participant about them, will help cement these in your mind. Remember to consider not only your thoughts for implementing your learning and future goals but to be clear about how this benefits your organisation. There is much research to show that if we act on our intentions immediately, then there is a significantly increased chance of that change sticking! Identify one thing to commit to that you think will make an immediate difference. Ideally this should be something that takes no more than 15 minutes each day and a habit that you either want to start or break. Commit to doing that each day for 21 days and see what impact that has!

Talking to others

Often the best way to know if you have learned anything is to show someone else. After your programme, talk to your colleagues about your experience and pass on your knowledge. Not only will this reinforce your learning but it will also help others.

Coaching

Many participants leave programmes inspired and energised but once back in the workplace, facing day-to-day life; those good intentions can get quickly forgotten. Working with a coach can ensure you maintain that momentum, as the simple knowledge that someone will contact you will ensure that you deliver on the action learning goals you committed to.

Effective learning is not something that just happens and it's certainly not something that can be left to training programmes alone. Implementing these steps will ensure that what you learn remains with you – try it and see the difference!



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Before your programme

Depending on the programme you are attending you will receive a combination of the following:

- pre-programme calls from your tutor
- 360-degree feedback
- pre-programme reading
- self assessment questionnaires
- completing relevant exercises

During the programme

At the end of your programme you will be asked to complete an action plan as well as some short term goals as a result of your learning. There is also ample opportunity for reflection time and 1-2-1 coaching with a programme tutor.

After the programme

We aim to continue to keep in touch with you with a combination of the following:

- an option of follow up coaching (telephone or face to face)
- a specific 3 and/or 6 month follow up activity which could be suggested reading or something to think about related to the programme you have attended
- a reminder to act on personal commitments made at the end of the programme
- 3 months free membership of our Learning Resource Centre
- an invitation to our annual Refresh Conference to reinvigorate and continue your learning.