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The Three Pillars of Leadership Development and Training

How to Build a Foundation for Measurable Results

a fierce white paper

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How to Build a Foundation for Measurable Results

SUMMARY

Leadership development and training opportunities are brought to the workplace for a number of reasons. An analysis may have uncovered the need to improve performance, increase productivity or decrease response times. The organization may wish to build expertise among employees, strengthen engagement or enhance loyalty. While the reasons are multiple and varied, **the goal for all successful training initiatives is the same: results.**

Delivering popular programs is not enough; leadership development and training is not successful unless it makes a positive, sustained impact on business.

Fierce believes organizations will see greater results and realize more measurable return on their training dollars if they focus on three pillars: **sponsorship, strategic deployment and transfer of learning.**

1) Sponsorship

Sponsorship is not only about high-level buy-in, but also about creating an environment for change and connecting training to key organizational initiatives. Executive sponsors who are engaged and actively committed to a program set the stage for change and encourage managers to support the process.

2) Strategic Deployment

When creating a plan for implementation, the following phases are essential: alignment, kickoff and rollout. Pinpoint why training has been brought in, to whom it should be delivered and how it will be strategically announced and rolled out within the organization.

3) Transfer of Learning

Ensure a higher degree of user adoption by visualizing and executing long-term changes, including a pre-defined transfer of learning plan to immediately apply new skills on the job.

SPONSORSHIP

Visibility is key, and awareness is the first step. Identify and engage sponsors early in the process to create powerful supporters and collaborators.

With multiple programs to juggle, why should sponsors care about a particular training initiative? Fierce recommends asking the following key sponsorship questions before a new program is launched.

Key Sponsorship Questions

- Do executive sponsors agree it is the right training for right now?
- What connections exist between the training and organizational initiatives they are responsible to support?
- Have they been provided with everything they need to speak to the program and explain the benefits?
- Are they able to describe the program in a succinct and compelling way?
- Have they gone through the training themselves?
- How will they model new concepts?
- Do they expect participation and continued use?
- What business results do they anticipate?

Organizational Support

An unsupportive organizational culture will quickly destroy the most well-intentioned programs. If behaviors are not modeled and expectations are not clear, trainees are quick to perceive programs as being impractical or the next “flavor of the month.” In such cases, the status quo is both safer and easier.

Fierce helps clients build support within the organization by mapping learning to competencies and initiatives sponsors care about.

Manager Support

Once executive sponsorship is established and stakeholders have a clear understanding of how training links to the business, the environment is conducive to managers providing the critical support necessary for success. Managers who encourage participation and clearly express the expectation that direct reports practice new skills and put learning into action are more likely to see results.

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CEO of Fierce, Inc. “They’ll ask themselves, ‘If my leader isn’t committed to this, why should I invest my time?’ The implication is the training is another passing fad with no real connection to long-term objectives.”

Change occurs when managers are willing and able to model behaviors and foster accountability for program goals.

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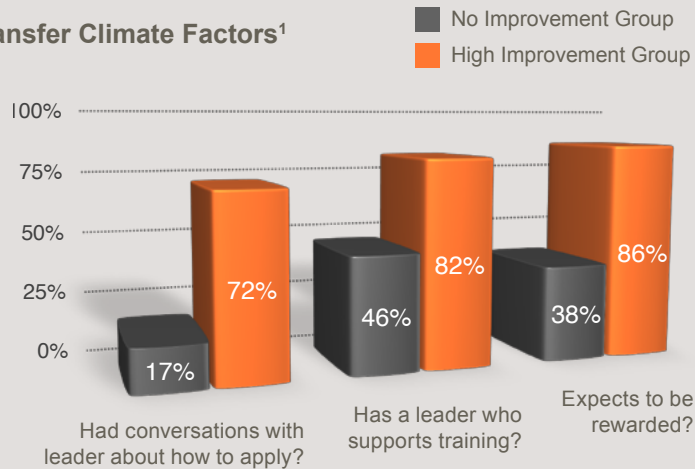
Susan Scott, Fierce, Inc.

HOW MUCH DOES MANAGER SUPPORT IMPACT LEARNING?

Managers have a profound influence on the effectiveness of training. When new information is readily adopted and affects performance, managers are usually the main reason. If programs fail and learners do not retain information or put learning into practice, managers must accept some responsibility. Managers empower learners when they invest time before and after training to set expectations and discuss new learning.

The graph below depicts the impact immediate managers have on the successful transfer and application of knowledge from training programs. The largest gap in the success rate is whether managers converse with employees about plans to apply learning on the job.

Transfer Climate Factors¹



This illustration originally printed in *Training Industry Quarterly* depicts the results of one Fortune 500 company. Surveys were conducted over a 3-year study with more than 2,000 managers and directors. The factors represented are all within the control of immediate managers.

¹ Paul Leone, Ph.D., “Take Your ROI to Level 6,” *Training Industry Quarterly*. A Training Industry, Inc. Ezine, (Spring 2008), <http://www.trainingindustry.com/TIQ>.

What happens when senior leaders believe workshops are only for certain levels of employees?

While functional training is frequently segregated, core learning strives to be inclusive. If employees do not have access to the same programs as leaders, disconnects are inevitable. When leadership appears to dictate a program rather than actively participate in it, the perceived value is diminished.

Inclusion and Connection

Differences in expectations within a company's overall culture lead to rifts. In a time of bankruptcies and bailouts, corporations understand the significance of a strong and clear connection with employees.

If management and employees are engaged in the same training, even if it is in different formats, employees are more willing and enthused to enroll in training and take it on at a deeper level. Shared training is perceived as an opportunity to forward a career or help trainees become leaders at their company. When employees have this mindset, training dollars have a stronger impact, and ROI improves.

STRATEGIC DEPLOYMENT

Fierce's recommendation for a deployment strategy consist of three phases:

Phase A: **Alignment**

Phase B: **Kickoff**

Phase C: **Rollout**

Phase A: Alignment

During the alignment phase the main goal is to **create a compelling case for why training is taking place**. The desire for change should be understood and urgent, and the prospect of maintaining the status quo must be more frightening than the unknown.² This is the time to be crystal clear on the needs and drivers of the target audience and how training will benefit them.

"While training is sometimes brought in to reinforce culture or refresh skill sets, it is more often brought in to fix a problem," said Scott. "Something has happened

² John P. Kotter, "Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail," *Best of Harvard Business Review* (2006): 1.

“If you haven’t agreed on what success looks like, you won’t know when you’ve achieved it. We work with clients to help them define success.”

*Kim Bohr,
Fierce, Inc.*

or something is not happening.” While focusing on fixing the immediate pain is understandable, this approach is shortsighted. “Putting out fires is sometimes necessary, but it shouldn’t be the ultimate goal,” continued Scott.

Consider the overall intention of training. What are the underlying factors creating the issue or need? How does the program tie to the culture and long-term plans of the organization?

Know The Destination Before the Journey Begins

A focused picture of what level of results is expected is critical. Will stakeholders be satisfied with “smile sheets” showing a facilitator is well liked or participants enjoyed the learning experience? Chances are slim. In today’s business world, benefits must outweigh cost. Has learning transferred? Is it being applied on the job? Is it having an impact on business?³

Fierce acts on the belief that goals will not be reached unless they are clearly envisioned and defined, and initiatives will lose momentum without a focused purpose. Kim Bohr, Executive Vice President of client development at Fierce, Inc., put it simply. “If you haven’t agreed on what success looks like, you won’t know when you’ve achieved it. We work with clients to help them define success.”

When should the evaluation process start?

Evaluation should not be left until the program is completed. Surveys or interviews should be conducted and data points or key performance indicators (KPIs) captured before and after a program. Fierce provides pre-surveys to capture changes resulting from training. They also provide interpretation of training impact, both on attendees’ personal beliefs as well as on organizational tendencies.

Gathering feedback is not all about attendees. Trainees, their immediate supervisors, their direct reports, their clients and/or colleagues are all possible audiences and may be part of the strategy to provide metrics for measuring effectiveness.⁴

Fierce recommends considering the following during the alignment phase:

- What are the desired results?
- How much time will be allowed for the behavior change to take place?

³ Donald L. Kirkpatrick and James D. Kirkpatrick, *Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2006).

⁴ Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick, *Evaluating Training Programs* (emphasis in original).

- Is a 100% response rate necessary or is a sampling adequate?
- Will results be based on proof or evidence?
- What indicators will show change? (Examples: turnover, engagement, output, sick leave, etc.)
- How will data be collected?
- How do metrics connect to and impact corporate initiatives?

Phase B: Kickoff

Whenever possible, a kickoff event such as a [keynote](#) is a powerful mechanism to build excitement, introduce executive sponsors and communicate the link between training objectives and the organization's strategic plan.

Participants should leave the kickoff event with clear expectations and a plan.

Assembling participants allows the speaker to tailor messages to the intended audience, explain why training was brought in and ensure everyone starts out on the same page. When learners understand the reason behind training, they are more willing to engage and actively guide the solution.

At a kickoff event and thereafter there is no such thing as over communication. Frequent, consistent communication ensures messages pierce through the overload of information busy professionals hear on a daily basis and serves as a reminder of commitments to grow and change.

Make it easy for everyone at the kickoff event to succeed. People often understand the why of new initiatives, but not the how. Participants should leave the kickoff event with clear expectations and a plan.

Phase C: Rollout

[Intact team training and open enrollment sessions](#) are two of the most common methods of deploying new programs. Fierce believes both have benefits and are appropriate within a holistic rollout strategy; however, delivering to intact teams is a more effective way to create an atmosphere for change as well as isolate and measure the impact of training.

What are intact teams?

In an intact team setting, participants may be made up of actual functional teams or cohort groups such as high performers. Teams that work in silos and need to collaborate more effectively or departments that work together on a regular basis (e.g., sales, marketing and customer service) may be grouped as well. Whatever

criteria build the connection, the outcome of intact training is an immediate impact on the team as a whole and a strong tie to organizational initiatives.

Wick's work in *The Six Disciplines of Breakthrough Learning* supports Fierce's recommendation. In the book he describes the benefits of going through a learning experience as a cohesive unit. "Learning transfer is enhanced when a critical mass of employees has received the same training simultaneously. This creates an environment in which learners can provide mutual support and reinforcement for the new language, concepts and behaviors."⁵ Participants synchronize with colleagues and receive the tools they need to work together to achieve goals.

In contrast, open enrollment sessions focus more on personal development needs and limit the measurement of training effectiveness to the individual. There is likely to be less support for these individuals to transfer learning back to their jobs.

Where do open enrollment sessions fit in the picture?

Fierce believes open enrollment sessions are ideal when new hires or transfers join a team that has already been trained in an intact setting or when elements of a program are part of a formal leadership development series.

TRANSFER OF LEARNING

How will learning affect the workplace?

Unless newly acquired knowledge and skills are transferred from the classroom to the real world, they are useless to the bottom line. How learning will be continuously applied should not be an afterthought; the transfer of learning from training should be one of the main considerations in any initiative.

One study conducted by the authors of *The Six Disciplines of Breakthrough Learning* and their colleague illustrates an unfortunate but typical experience. The focus of the study was a highly rated and award-winning training program rolled out to approximately six hundred managers at a major chemical company over the course of a year. Only 15% of people interviewed were able to give an example of an action they had taken on-the-job as a result of what they learned. The learning had taken place, but participants were not doing anything with it.

Unless newly acquired knowledge and skills are transferred from the classroom to the real world, they are useless to the bottom line.

⁵ Calhoun Wick, Roy Pollock, Andrew Jefferson and Richard Flanagan, *The Six Disciplines of Breakthrough Learning: How to Turn Training and Development Into Business Results* (San Francisco, CA: Pfeiffer, 2006), 151.

⁶ Wick, Pollock, Jefferson, Flanagan. *The Six Disciplines of Breakthrough Learning*, 99-100 (emphasis in original).

This percentage is in alignment with the majority of studies on learning transfer. Most industry-accepted estimates suggest only about 15-20% of organizational learning investments result in performance changes.

Make Learning Relevant

At Fierce, classes use “real-play” instead of role-play so participants leave the classrooms with solutions to pertinent problems. Tackling real problems during training is a natural way to build new learning into ongoing tasks and projects.

Fierce provides tools to move from the classroom to the real world. Takeaway flipbooks are used during training as well as when learners return to the workplace. Fierce also recommends participants engage with the [30 Days of Living Fierce journal](#) to organize thoughts after training and create actionable next steps.

Create a Plan

Fierce recommends training rollouts include a pre-defined transfer of learning plan for participants. The plan should include immediate application of new learning and clear, attainable goals with time limits. The process relies on the cooperation of training participants, managers and the organization as a whole. Trainees and managers both have an ongoing responsibility to follow through with what has been learned.

By following a pre-defined transfer of learning plan, learners are able to develop new habits. Transfer of learning occurs when new skills become the natural way of doing things and are incorporated into day-to-day business actions and decisions.

Keep Training Alive at the Organizational Level

Imagine the impact if organizations supported people focusing on programs long enough to get all they could from them. What if organizations invested in pre-training preparation and post-training follow-up rather than only investing in the training event? Value is multiplied when facilitators and managers are encouraged to check in on learners and see how new learning is being applied in the workplace.

² Michael Leimbach, “Learning Transfer Model: A Research-Driven Approach to Enhancing Learning Effectiveness” *Industrial and Commercial Training* Vol. 42 Iss: 2 (2010): 81–86.

CONCLUSION

Fierce partners with organizations to help launch effective programs that change the way business is done. By focusing on three pillars, **sponsorship, strategic deployment** and **transfer of learning**, Fierce collaborates with world-class leaders to create an end-to-end story around what they accomplish. **Fierce succeeds when clients become heroes in their organizations.**

Whether the need is to drive cultural change or reduce costs associated with poor communication, Fierce brings results. To find out more about how to improve communication, realize more return on training investments and provide cutting edge leadership development and training, visit us at www.fierceinc.com.

About Fierce

Fierce, Inc. is a [leadership development and training](#) company that drives results for business and education by developing conversation as a skill. Traditional programs are impersonal, complicated and disconnected from concrete results. Fierce creates authentic, energizing and rewarding connections with colleagues and customers through skillful conversations that lead to successful outcomes and measurable ROI. Tailored to any organization, Fierce principles and methods translate across the globe, ensure individual and collective success and develop skills that are practical, easy-to-learn and can be applied immediately. Fierce, Inc. is certified as a Women-Owned Business by the Women's Business Enterprise National Council and the Astra Women's Business Alliance. Please find us in Seattle and online at www.fierceinc.com.