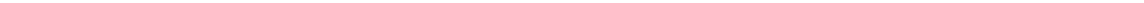


The Performance Trainer

By Paul Archer



© Archer Training Ltd 2003.



What is a Performance Trainer?

Someone once said to me at the beginning of my training career... "The trick is to get the people you train to perform better when they get back to work. The problem, Paul, is that we never know whether they are or not"

That sentence haunted me for some years. Surely when a company puts money into its resources it needs a pay back. Service and fix the photocopier and you expect to see hundreds and thousands of pieces of paper flying out the other end effortlessly. So how come when we spend thousands of pounds developing our people, we can't see results?

Then, as usually happens in life, I stumbled across some work from other development professionals which made me see the light. This article will give you a brief insight into what I learnt and have practised considerably since that time in the 1990's.

The 6 Step Systematic Approach

Many of us have seen the traditional training cycle. This involves, analyse the training need, develop training material, deliver and validate. There are flaws in this system which the 6 Step Approach irons out. Here's the approach put graphically.



Entry

Your customers will often come to you with a solution in mind. This is dangerous and where the training field, and you, can get a bad reputation.

It's not a bad thing to be told what training is needed. But what it can do is make it very difficult to measure the impact later on down the line. In fact it makes this almost impossible.

Entry is about exploring the issues surrounding the need for training. It can take 10 minutes on the phone or a series of meetings with your customer – there's no set timescale. But what you need to do is achieve certain results yourself.

What do you need to achieve?

We need to understand the context behind the issues and how resourceful the customer is. These are very important. Get these right and you will shine out in the crowd of training and development consultants.

Here's some questions you can use to get the big picture from the customer.

- Business Drivers
 - Why is this initiative happening now?
 - What/who are the key drivers?
 - How important is this?
 - What would be the consequences if it fails?
- Change Environment
 - What is the history of change?
 - How effective is the team/organisation at managing change?
 - Is there any other kind of change going on?
- Structure and Politics
 - Who are the key players in this initiative?
 - How are they perceived in the organisation?
 - How well do they relate to each other?
 - How might internal politics affect the issue?
- Available Resources - energy, expertise, influence, control.
 - Who has it?
 - Do they use it?
 - Is there enough?
 - Can it be released?

We need to find out the resourcefulness of both the customer and their team/department/company. We need to investigate hard resources such as time and budget and soft resources such as capabilities of team members, expertise within the company. This bit is very useful for later on in the cycle when you search for the subject matter expert (SME)

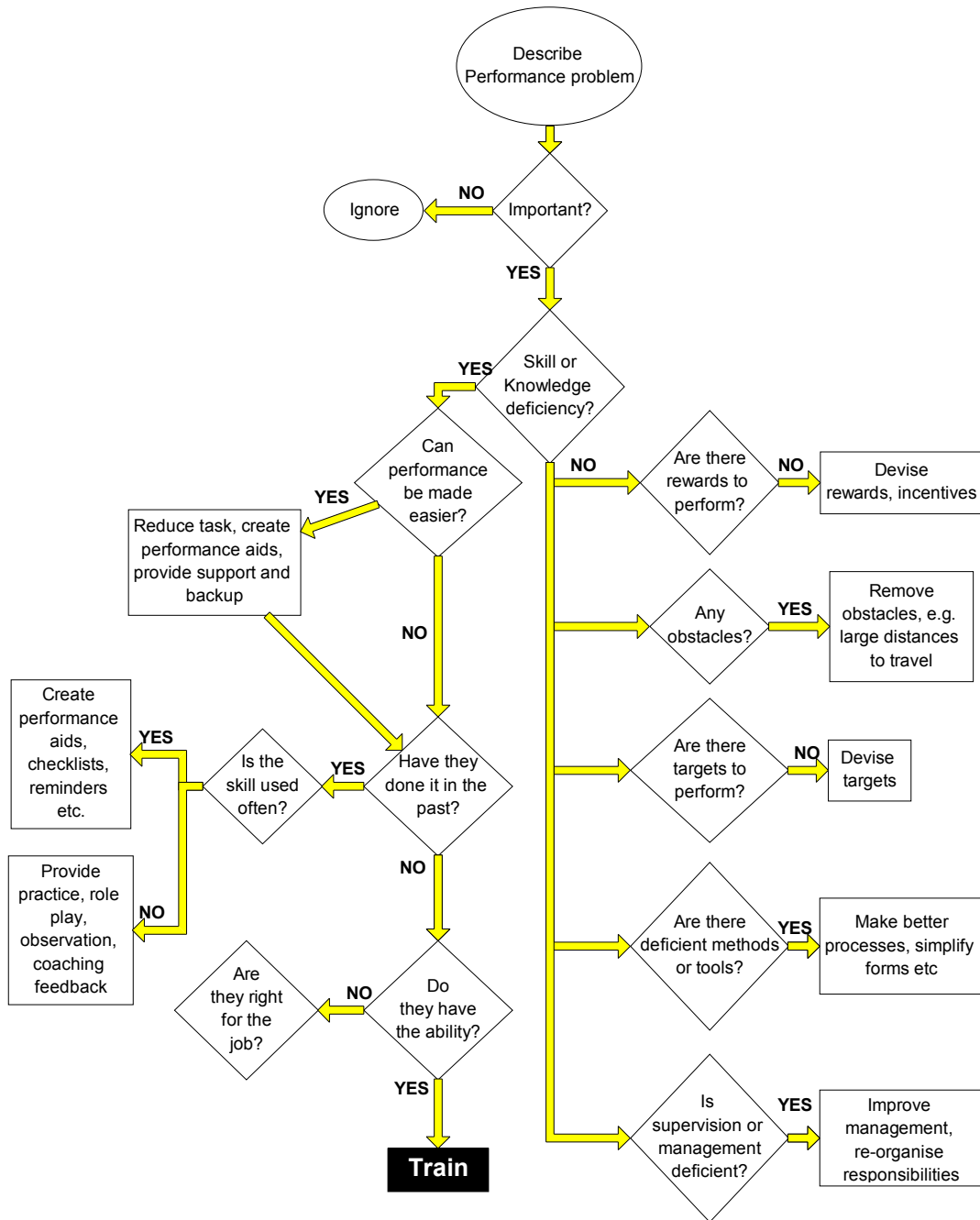
Performance Analysis

If there's a book you want to read over the summer then it has to be *Analysing Performance Problems* by Robert Mager and Peter Pipe. Marvellous piece of work which forms the basics of what I'm going to tell you about right now.

Before we start we ought to get one thing straight. What we're doing right now is not a TNA. Training Needs Analysis. This is wrong since using this process automatically infers a need for training. We don't even know what the issue is yet and we're already talking about training. We wouldn't go up to a broken photocopier and say "hey we need a paper need analysis on this photocopier 'cos the thing has jammed again"

We need to conduct a performance analysis, in other words delve into the performance issue, which maybe...and only maybe...training might be one of the solutions.

This flowchart could help you decide what's needed. It has been adapted from Mager and Pipe – *Analysing Performance Problems*.



Listing solutions

Next step is to brainstorm all the solutions that came from the flowchart and your discussions with the customer. Suspend judgement at the moment.

Then decide which ones have the greatest gain for the least cost and inconvenience.

Audience analysis

Training and development initiatives must, absolutely must be designed with an audience in mind. Even though others may receive the same training, for the sake of your credibility, you must design it for a particular audience.

Subject Matter Expertise

Now you know roughly what you intend to do i.e. the desired performance and who your target group is going to be, it's time to see what existing material is available. Anything that covers the ground or gives you ideas.

However, you will need local expertise to help you design the solutions. No one person will have all the skills and knowledge for the complete training package. Identify your experts and involve them now.

Learning Objectives

We've already got our performance objective i.e. the desired performance we're looking for from our audience. Now is the time to tighten this up maybe. But definitely we need to construct our learning objectives.

Traditional objective setting in training fails because they are not measurable. For example at the end of the training, delegates will be able to understand the steps involved in a first interview. This doesn't stack up.

There are four elements to a good learning objective:

- Conditions
- Performance
- Standards
- Method of Assessment

Conditions

Everything has to happen under conditions. It's one of life's little rules. The trick in training is to get the conditions as near to the real thing as possible.

The sales negotiator often has to answer the phone in a noisy office, with other phones ringing, people talking, distractions occurring all the time. However the same negotiator will need to learn style and language of the telephone in a quiet environment first before she can do the same performance in a real setting.

This is why the use of actors for role play is becoming more and more common since they are trained to act as though they were real customers or subjects. But they cost a little bit more.

Performance

Whatever is performed must be observable. Make sure the verb you use is actionable. Use the words "watch me" afterwards to make sure you're on the right track.

Standards

How well must the performance be done? To what degree of excellence? This is a tricky part. They must be:

- Measurable and attainable
- Set just right. Too low and they will not be effective. Too high and they will de-motivate.
- Appropriate for the topic. Safety based objectives, for example, have to be 100% however closing ratios for prospecting can be 20 – 30%
- Linked to the performance expected in real life

Method of Assessment

We must specify how it's going to be assessed, so we can do it. Is it by a supervisor ticking a checklist or a written test.

The SAVI Approach to learning

Much has been written recently on the subject of accelerated learning. But does it work? The answer is yes, and we really all ought to be practising it's principles. And I don't mean just bringing in a CD Player into the classroom.

This means trainers can use accelerated learning to:

- cover more content in less time and with reduced frustration
- make it easier for delegates to digest content that is complex or theoretical
- make it easier for them to master skills by providing increased opportunity for practice
- increase retention by creating vivid and memorable learning experiences
- facilitate transfer of learning to the job by spending more time on application

The average adult attention span in the passive mode is about 20 minutes. After that, some attempt to stimulate the brain must be made or learners will find it difficult to maintain an optimal state for learning. In other words...they'll fall asleep. But the clever thing is – they do this with their eyes open but partially glazed.

One of the limitations of relying on the lecture as the main method of instruction is that learners remain passive for extended periods. This provides the brain with little stimulation and makes it difficult for participants to maintain the heightened level of alertness that is required for learning.

The major cause of alertness is physical movement. Movement improves mental processing. The part of the human brain involved in bodily movement (the motor cortex) is tucked right next to the part of the brain used for thinking and problem solving.

Now learning doesn't automatically improve by having people stand up, wave their hands in the air and reciting the numbers 1 to 10 in Japanese. It improves by combining physical movement with intellectual activity and using all the senses.

If you ever wanted a succinct definition of accelerated learning you've just seen it.

It's called SAVI learning. Somatic, auditory, visual and intellectual.

Somatic Learning

This means getting physical, tactile, hands-on. Using and moving your body when learning. If the body ain't movin', the brain ain't groovin'.

Create learning events that get people up and out of their seats and physically active from time to time. Not all the time. Alternate between physically active and inactive. Everyone likes variety.

Try these ways of increasing the physical side of your session design.

- Getting people to take up roles in a process or system. For example: computer applications, business procedures, the features and benefits of products and sales processes.
- Get people to build a model or process
- Allow them to create large pictograms or pictures
- Get them to have a learning experience
- Do an active learning game or simulation
- Play a game of snap where a feature and benefit makes a snap.
- Put a process or map that you want people to learn and copy it onto a jigsaw for people to put together
- Take a trip to interview members of the public
- Create mini exercises for others to complete

Auditory Learning

Auditory learning was standard for most cultures since history began. People would talk out loud to each other, tell each other stories and everyone would listen. If you think about it that is why we use the word *history*.

Design your sessions so they appeal to the strong auditory learners. Get people to talk about what they're learning. Try these ideas:

- Have them read out loud from manuals
- Ask them to create their own audio tape of key words, processes etc
- Tell stories that have their learning embedded in them
- Get pairs to tell each other what they've learnt and how they're going to apply it.
- When role playing or acting a simulation, get people to tell you out loud what they're doing
- Have them create a rhyme or limerick from what they've learnt
- Get people to talk non-stop about the features of a product. Ask the neighbour to summarise out loud at the end

Visual Learning

The fact is that there is more equipment in our brains for processing images than anything else. A picture paints a thousand words. Visual people like to see things, make maps. They like to see colour and shapes and icons.

And I don't mean "death by PowerPoint"

Try these:

- Use picturesque language in your explanations. Make head pictures and imagination
- Use vivid graphics in your presentation. Colour and photographs
- Bring in 3-dimensional objects
- Go for dramatic body language. Use your arms to gesture not to hold your hands.
- Tell vivid stories
- Get them to create pictograms
- Make job aids with icons and pictures
- Use mind maps
- Use room peripherals

Intellectual Learning

This means what a learner would do in her head to exercise their intelligence to make meanings, connections, discoveries, plans etc etc.

It's the reflecting, creating, problem-solving and meaning building part

When a learning exercise, however clever and brilliantly constructed doesn't stimulate the intellectual side of the brain, the exercise appears as shallow and childish.

Beware of this. This is where most trainers go wrong. And get heavily criticised for.

Here's some ideas of the activities you can create in your sessions:

- Solving problems
- Analysing experiences
- Doing strategic planning
- Generating ideas
- Formulating questions
- Creating mental models
- Applying new ideas to a job
- Thinking things through and summarising

Summary

Way back in the late 1980's when Kylie first topped the charts and Maggie was still in power, I began as a training officer and looking for guidance and development, I read a book by Frank Salisbury called "The Sales Trainer". After I'd finished the book I knew where Frank was going. Good sales training should start and finish with the sales management team.

My only problem with that is they generally don't have the time to create and design.

The 6 step process doesn't say who should deliver the material you've created. It has been created by a professional and the content put together with a full understanding of the performance objectives of a manager. Surely the sales manager should deliver?

But that's another debate on another day.