

## ASTD 2008 Learning Transfer Contest

Second Runner-Up: Marie Wehrung

Rice University, USA

**LEARNING:** What key learning from the 2008 ASTD International Conference did you apply back on the job? *Please include the source of this learning (workshops, sessions, certificate programs, peers, etc.)*

I've had "evaluation of learning" on my radar screen for a while, but hadn't made much progress implementing this consistently across my learning program. I am now in the process of creating a High Impact Learning environment based on two particular concurrent sessions I attended: [TU117] "The Training's NOT the Thing: Getting Business Results from Training" and [TU320] "Training Impact Evaluation that Senior Managers Believe and Use." Up until I attended the sessions, I knew it was important to evaluate the effect of learning back on the job, and was focused on assessing learning (using pre- and post-tests), and thinking about how to find out systematically what behaviors had changed back on the due to the learning (i.e., Kirkpatrick's level 3 of evaluation). I wasn't sure we'd ever evaluate the effectiveness of learning at the level of ROI, but evaluating learning to level 3 would have been an accomplishment. In the sessions the information I gained was not rocket science, but eye-opening nonetheless. I learned the following: 1. tying course objectives to behaviors that would result from newly acquired skills would impact achieving individual results and organizational objectives. 2. ensuring that learners and managers communicate, and set a road map for acquisition and application of skills gained from the training to produce results, is a critical component to ensure learning is retained and benefits the organization 3. the financial benefit to the organization of applying learning to produce results is impressive; the cost to the organization of NOT doing so is staggering 4. managers and learners communicating about learning BEFORE training happens, and then following up afterwards, has a greater effect on the impact learning has back on the job than any other component of learning (course design, trainer's style, etc.) I left the conference inspired and determined to put this into practice for my own organization, and have been on the path to do so ever since.

**ACTION:** (40%) How did you put this learning into action in your organization or with your clients? What challenges did you overcome?

I'm in the midst of putting this learning into action, an initiative that I'm told likely will take 2 - 3 years to be implemented fully. However, I've taken the following steps towards full implementation: 1. attended a 3-day workshop to become certified in the Advantage Way High Impact Learning methodology 2. directed the work of a graduate student intern in Fall 2008 to establish some processes and begin to introduce the methodology to campus 3. used the Advantage Way resources provided through my licensing agreement to create learner's and managers' manuals, then held training ("managers' booster") sessions to introduce interested managers to the process, and get their agreement to implement it 4. created impact maps for our training classes to incorporate the Advantage Way methodology into our learning 5. worked with course facilitators to incorporate the High Impact Learning process into their sessions 6. met with our Information Technology staff to brainstorm ways and resources to create a repository for the materials, provide managers with a means to track their learners' accomplishments, and automate the system for inviting managers to the "booster" sessions, tracking action plans, etc. 7. registered to attend a "Users' Group" meeting in February to learn best practices and "gotcha's" from those who've gone before me, and gain additional support for implementing this process campus-wide. Challenges: As a non-profit educational institution that neither focuses on "the bottom line" nor charges internal departments for the training HR offers, I had to come up with a way to sell this notion of getting high impact from learning, and identify the cost to departments when they don't. The recent economic downturn, and a brief hiring freeze, have made my arguments more compelling, because we're now forced to do more with less, and maximize the return on our investments. As a result there's more receptivity towards this than I anticipated early on given our culture.

**RESULTS:** (40%) How has your application of learning made a difference to the organization, the business, or your offerings? *Please support your answers with available metrics or other criteria that clearly show the impact.*

In our university culture it's difficult to mandate anything - no mandatory programs (unless required by law), training, etc. As such, we've had to enroll departments to see the potential benefits of this program and sign on to "kick the tires" and give it a try. It's too early in the implementation process to provide metrics or other statistical data, especially since the pool of managers and their learners engaged in this process is still relatively small. However, in just a few short months, we've already experienced the following: 1. a learner saying that, for the first time since she came to work here about 10 years ago, she and her supervisor are communicating about what's expected of her in the job, what they're out to accomplish as a department, her goals for attending training sessions, etc. 2. a manager implementing this process not only with her direct reports, but also helping the snowball get larger by guiding those direct reports who are managers to use it with THEIR direct reports 3. a

## ASTD 2008 Learning Transfer Contest

Second Runner-Up: Marie Wehrung

Rice University, USA

re-evaluation of our training programs, as they come up in the queue, to ensure we've identified strong, measurable objectives for each course, as well as stated behaviors that trainees and their managers can expect to result from acquisition and application of the skills learned 4. heightened attention to post-training retention throughout training classes, since facilitators are slowly beginning to remind learners to look at their impact maps, and write "next steps" on their action plans 5. a focus on objectives, and incorporating the high impact learning methodology, for a management development program currently in design phase 6. improved attendance in sessions (from folks who've already become engaged in this process), since they know what's available, and what's at stake if they miss the session.

**SUPPORT: (20%)** What factors helped you the most to put your learning into action? Who were your supporters and champions?

The more I learned about this methodology during the 2008 ASTD ICE, the more I knew I HAD to do something to implement it. It's really the next key piece of my learning program, and I felt I would be remiss in my responsibilities if I didn't turn my attention to it. I gained the support of the following individuals in this endeavor: 1. my boss, the Associate VP for Human Resources 2. some enthusiastic supervisors across campus. I knew those initial "wins," and testimonials from various department representatives, would help sell this initiative in a way that HR alone might not be able to. 3. the consultants in the Advantage Performance Group have provided guidance and encouragement, and answered my umpteen questions, as I've started this implementation process. 4. my graduate student intern was a great help in getting some of the nuts and bolts in place - assembling manuals, making contact with departments, sending impact maps, arranging training sessions, etc. 5. one user in particular (Jeff Hafen, Clark County School District, Las Vegas, NV) of the Advantage Way High Impact Learning methodology has been a real champion of the program, encouraging me in the face of not knowing how to climb this mountain to implement and gain buy-in for this new initiative. Finally, the economic downturn has been a blessing in disguise, and helped throw more weight, and a sense of urgency, behind this initiative. For a while we had a hiring freeze in place; departments HAD to make the best use of their existing staff. We've also given back some budget dollars to shore up the university-wide budget - that had an impact on dollars that might have been used to send folks to outside vendors for training. My training program suddenly became even more valuable to the campus. As we continue to implement this high impact learning initiative, knowledge of this "hidden" internal resource will spread, and its value continue to increase . . . now justifiably so!