

## 7 reasons why direct supervisors do not provide post-training support and what to do about them

In the late 1800s, German psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus discovered the forgetting curve. Since then, researchers have repeatedly shown that people instantly start forgetting what they've just learned—as much as 70 percent within 24 hours.

Training reinforcement has proved to be key and L&D experts are constantly coming up with new, improved, innovative and hi-tech ways of providing this reinforcement.

However many new technologies we bring in, however much emphasis we put on micro-learning, whatever we do to ensure continued education, none of it is as effective as the support, encouragement and inspiration provided by the direct supervisor of the participant. This is so because it's just not possible for anyone else to be as in sync with participants' day to day activities as the supervisor. This places them in the unique position of knowing what the participants are doing well, where they are struggling and what they need as just in time support.

Yet, more often than not, it is observed that the participants go back to the work-space and find themselves to be without any support from their supervisors. In fact, they might even face resistance from their supervisors to the changes they are trying to make. This leads to up to 70 % participants trying but failing to achieve on the job behaviour change as a result of the learning they had.

Supervisors are not bad people; it is not even in their best interests to have their team members fail. Then why do they not provide post-training support?

Here are the top 7 reasons and what to do about them –

- 1) The training program is not in alignment with their needs/expectations for their team

**What to do about it** – particularly for mission critical programs, involve the supervisors and the business heads right in the beginning and design the program to suit their needs. Don't come up with a program and think hey, this will be useful for X team. Go to X team, find out their pain - point, understand their need, ask the right questions using a consultative approach and then design the program. If after all this, there is still not support, investigate to see if any 'culture' issues exist.

- 2) The supervisors don't really know what training their team members are attending and hence don't know how to support their team

**What to do about it** – Depending on the criticality of the program, take the supervisors through a condensed version of the program to help them be familiar with the content of it. Help them understand what their role is, what they are expected to do post the training and what behaviours they should look out for. If necessary, create focussed observation sheets for them to make it easier for them to look out for desired behaviours.

3) There is too much time/deadline/target pressure

**What to do about it** – Show them the money. Show them how the success of their team members will lead to direct impact on the business. Help them see the value of supporting their team members in reaching the desired behaviours at the earliest. This is best done in programs that are designed for the specific needs of the business.

4) They think training is just ‘fluff’ it is not going to add any real value

**What to do about it** – This perception is usually due to L&D teams being order-takers rather than consultants with the business. The L&D function must step up, gain a seat at the table through demonstrating how it is helping impact bottom lines and adding value to the business.

5) They believe they are supporting but they end up doing more harm than good

**What to do about it** – Many supervisors become supervisors because they were good at their jobs, not because they had the best leadership qualities. This means that very often they are not skilled at giving feedback or skilled to take on a coach role. They realize the importance of post training support, observe their team members and then end up giving feedback in such a manner that the participant is completely turned off. Or they end up saying you shouldn't do this; you should do such and such. The two-fold problem with this is that what they say might be against what they are being taught or it completely fills independence and free thinking from their team.

6) They find it difficult to connect with every team member and provide feedback

**What to do about it** – In today's superfast, virtual world, despite best intentions managers are often not able to connect with their teams often enough to provide on-going support. For this it is imperative to use tools such as Promote or other learning transfer platforms, which allow managers and participants to stay in touch on a focussed topic over an extended period. The connect does not have to happen in real time. The participant may post a comment about a topic on a day and the manager on their way to work the next day or when they find themselves with a bit of down time, may reply to those comments at their leisure. Such a tool also helps them track progress of their entire team, encourage those lagging, reward the performers etc.

7) They think it's not their job since learning is the job of the L&D function!

**What to do about it** – Since no one has told them otherwise, managers do at times think that learning is the sole responsibility of the L&D function and their role is to just ensure that they allow their team members to attend the training. Nothing could be further from the truth and it is the responsibility of the L&D function to show them research such as the Brinkerhoff study on the importance of post-training support. It is also important to come to an agreement on the level/degree of support expected at the beginning of the discussion about the program rather than to spring it as a surprise at the end.

The responsibility of successfully transferring learning to behaviour lies on the course content, delivery, the level of post training support and the environment at the work place. It is crucial to get the balance of all these right to come with the perfect recipe for success.