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The Training Program Manager's Playbook

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Talent development professionals face a unique challenge – with often limited resources, they must strategically train and optimize the talent of their entire workforce. With the right strategy, this effort can have a tremendous impact on an organization, but this leaves little time for program managers to develop their own talents.

This is seemingly paradoxical because the more that a program manager invests in their own skills, the more potential impact they can have on an organization, and yet so little of their time goes into developing their own skills.

One of the biggest barriers for program managers and their personal development is discovering where to start.

We looked at some core competencies of program managers and compared them against the nine characteristics we've identified in great training programs.

9 Characteristics of Top Training Programs

Program Management

This means that the program manager knows and follows best practices for establishing effective learning and increased performance.

Needs Assessment

This means the program manager is able to identify organizational needs and align those needs to the training being conducted.

Alignment

This competency shows that program managers can address challenges within an organization through training, in an effort to support business goals.

Goals and Metrics

This step in the training process ensures that training isn't only aligned to business goals, but is being measured and reaching milestones on the way to achieving those big goals.

Leadership Buy-In

Leadership buy-in drives the perception of your training program across the organization – having leaders who understand the value of your program will help you achieve greater results!

Relevancy

This characteristic takes the idea of alignment a step further, and says that not only must training be aligned to business goals, but training events must be relevant to the achievement of those goals.

Creativity

The most relevant, aligned training program will suffer to achieve results without marketing and buy-in from people. Here, creativity becomes a key characteristic for strong programs.

Communication Strategy

That creativity must also be infused with a distinct strategy that's designed with your audience in mind and effectively increases engagement with your training program.

Post-Training Reinforcement

Training programs that actively reinforce learning see better learning retention and application on the job, and therefore much higher returns on their training investments.

These characteristics are consistently strong measuring sticks to gauge the effectiveness of a training program, and program managers' personal development should be aligned with these characteristics.

To dig deeper, we compared these competencies to existing frameworks, and found significant overlap.

We'll be tying our competencies specifically to the nine characteristics of top training programs and to this framework, based on Training Industry's Training Manager Competency Model:

Develop and Deliver Solutions

Identify Needs

Manage Technology

Strategic Alignment

Optimize Processes

Select and Manage Resources

Evaluate Performance

Develop & Deliver Solutions

Evaluate Performance

Optimize Processes

Strategic Alignment

Select & Manage Resources

Identify Needs

Manage Technology

These competencies have lots of overlap with our nine characteristics of top training programs, and they act as an excellent framework for developing competencies for program managers.

This workbook will provide practical applications combined with resources to assist with mastery of these competencies. You can refer back to any section at any time – repetition and testing are powerful learning tools, and we recommend that you leverage them, not just as you train your employees, but as you refine your own skills.

In this ebook, we're going to focus specifically on skills related to program management, needs assessment, goals and metrics, and leadership buy-in. By focusing on these competencies, you'll improve your own skills, and thus, the results of your program!

Each skill we outline will also be tied back to a competency, and we'll explain how application of these skills will impact your program!

There's a lot, so don't feel like you need to work through this all at once. Start with one area of weakness you see in your program and focus on improving your competencies until you see changes start having an impact!

Program Management

This subject covers several of Training Industry's competencies: managing technologies, optimizing processes, and developing and delivering solutions.

Effective program management is the backbone of a strong program – the skills needed go beyond simply training knowledge. They include vital soft skills like active listening, coordinating with others, managing people, and problem solving.

Additionally, we want to focus on business acumen as a crucial skill for program managers – this connects to the "needs assessment" core competency. Understanding your market, your product, your sales cycle, and the challenges your organization faces can only make you a stronger program manager.

One of the best ways to both improve your relationships with others and your business acumen is to discuss various business challenges with the stakeholders in your organization.

Take a few minutes and identify some key stakeholders who you'd like to learn from. They could be middle managers who are faced with a unique business challenge, or they could be senior leadership and have key insights into your organization's strategic goals.

Write down a few people who you could learn from!

1._____

2._____

3._____

4._____

5._____

These are people in your organization who have key information that could improve the way you train – don't ignore this, even if it's cheesy or uncomfortable.

After discovering who you'd like to speak with, consider reaching out via email or in person to schedule some time to chat – it doesn't have to be formal, but here's a template you can use:

Hey_____! I wanted to reach out to you because I know you're familiar with_____.
(recipient name) (challenge)

I'd like to pick your brain and learn more about_____and how this
(challenge)

affects_____. Maybe we can put our heads together and think of ways we can use training to improve results!
(company name)

During these conversations, spend time asking open-ended questions, and try to discover as much as you can about the challenges your organization faces.

Not only will this exercise improve your relationships, but you'll get crucial information that can help inform the way you align your training to business goals.

For specific details on best practices in corporate learning, be sure to refer to our ebook "Learning Science for L&D," where we present and analyze research that should help you make the best decisions for how you conduct your training!

Identify Needs

The exercises we listed in the program management section are still great exercises to help you identify needs, but this section goes a little deeper into needs analysis. We chose this competency to develop because identifying the specific needs of your organization are vital to conducting successful training.

Here's an example to show you what we mean:

Imagine a scenario in which you talk to your sales director about increasing sales revenue. The sales director tells you that your sales reps are not closing enough deals.

This information can be learned through discussion. Identifying needs, however, requires further investigation. The conversation above may suggest that sales reps need training on how to close deals – but what if the problem exists before sales reps ever attempt to close deals?

The problem could be that sales reps are struggling to qualify the right prospects – maybe the sales reps are using closing techniques on prospects that don't have the budget, the need, or the authority to sign a deal.

If this was true, then no amount of training around closing will help achieve sales goals, because that's not where the need exists.

Needs analysis is one of the toughest jobs for program managers, because it requires not only collaboration and discussion with stakeholders who hold key insights, but also because it requires sharp business acumen, and a deep understanding of your own business.

One activity that may help you identify needs is to work backwards as you create a curriculum.

As you work backwards, keep in mind that your company has a set of processes, and those processes are what tell employees how to do their jobs.

Everything your employees do, whether it's create new business, recognize their coworkers, or ask for a raise, happens through a specific process at your organization.

When a business challenge occurs, it can almost always be traced back to these processes breaking down in some way.

Because of this, it's especially important to specifically understand the process you're trying to improve.

Let's use compliance as an example.

In this example, you are the head of safety for a manufacturing plant. Last year, on average, employees missed 11% of the year due to workplace injuries, including repetitive stress injuries. Because of these absences, you missed your productivity goals by 5%.

In this instance, your business challenge is related to productivity and compliance, but the process that is breaking down occurs somewhere in how a machine is used.

At some point in the manufacturing process, employees must wear a brace before operating a given piece of machinery, but they feel that this process takes too long, and often ignore this step. This is leading to injuries.

In this example, the process is breaking down at the point that employees wear the brace. This step in the process is simply being ignored.

Almost all your business challenges are related to one or more process breakdowns, so your training should be aligned with improving those breakdowns.

Here's a quick framework you can use to suit your needs!

Business Challenges

What business challenge am I trying to solve?

If my training is successful, what will that success look like?

Understand the Process

What process am I trying to affect?

How is that process run today?

How is that process helping us get closer to our strategic goals?

Stakeholders and Initial Impressions

What stakeholders have key insights into this business challenge?

Where do they think the problem exists?

Diagnosis

Where do I think the problem exists?

What is my reasoning?

Implementing Training

How can I use my training program to help solve this business challenge?

How will I measure my success? (Be sure to check out our "Unpacking Kirkpatrick" ebook to learn more about training results measurement)

This framework should help you identify needs, but it's not the end-all be-all. You should add or modify the questions to better align with your program and processes, but these are very much the types of questions you should be asking as you work through assessing needs.

Develop Your Goals and Metrics

In the section on needs analysis, we said that your organization is built from a system of processes – your training program is no different!

This ties into two core competencies – evaluating performance and identifying needs.

One thing we strongly advise for our clients is to not only create a list of goals for your program, but understand the degree to which you achieved your goals by creating you can rely on to improve your training.

Data collection and data analysis are advanced skills for program managers, but they are two skills that truly separate average training programs from those that are a vital and instrumental part of an organization's success. In this regard, experimentation is a crucial element for gathering good data.

Here are a few tips to improve your data analysis skills:

Remember That Correlation Is Not Causation

It can be hard not to jump to conclusions when you're working with data. For instance, imagine you run a sales training event, and the quarter after you train, sales increase by 40%.

It can be really easy to attribute your sales training to that increase, but what if you hired a new sales director who has done a great job of leading your sales team? In this event, you cannot produce reliable statistics by attributing 100% of the growth to your training program.

Leaders are wary of over-exaggerated ROI claims, and if your data isn't reliable, you'll struggle to gain further leadership buy-in.

The best practice is to look for many factors to attribute your data to. In doing so, you'll be able to parse through large quantities of data to find the results relevant to your program.

Feel Free to Experiment

A strong training process is highly scientific, and the process closely aligns with the scientific method.

A training goal is essentially a hypothesis, in which you identify a challenge, and theorize that focused training, designed to change behaviors, will help overcome this challenge.

Even when training doesn't change results, that's still valuable data you can use to inform your next move – eliminating things that don't lead to your desired results will bring you closer to the variables that do change your results.

Training events are designed to change behaviors, but training processes are designed to change results.

A well-thought-out plan suggests "If X behavior changes, then Y result will change as well." If you're already comfortable in Excel, feel free to skip ahead – that said, Excel is often underused despite its powerful capabilities. If you can't confidently make a pivot table or chart, this exercise may be useful!

Experimenting means changing your X variable, but still following informed and educated decisions.

Master Excel

Excel spreadsheets are a powerful way to record, sort, and visualize your data. Mastering advanced fundamentals like pivot tables, charts, and sorting tables will improve the way you handle data. Here, we'll give you an example of data charting and visualization in Excel!

In this exercise, we're going to try to visualize the relationship between average test score, and courses completed.

If you're not totally confident in your Excel skills, create a new spreadsheet and do these steps in there as you read through them. Repetition is key!

(Note that this tutorial uses Excel 2016.)

Step 1: Create a Chart

We're going to use made up data for this exercise – it doesn't really mean anything, it's just there as a placeholder!
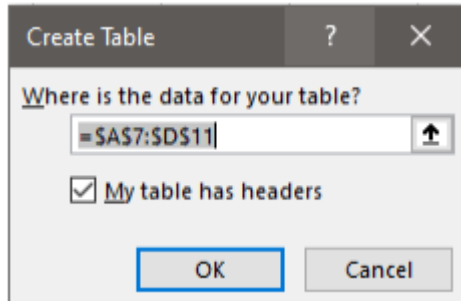
I. Start by copying this data:

Learner	Courses Completed	Department	Average Test Score
Jones	115	Marketing	82
Johnson	80	Sales	79
Lowry	62	Finance	65
Hamilton	147	IT	81

II. In your Excel spreadsheet, right click the cell at A1, and select "Paste as Values." It should look like this:
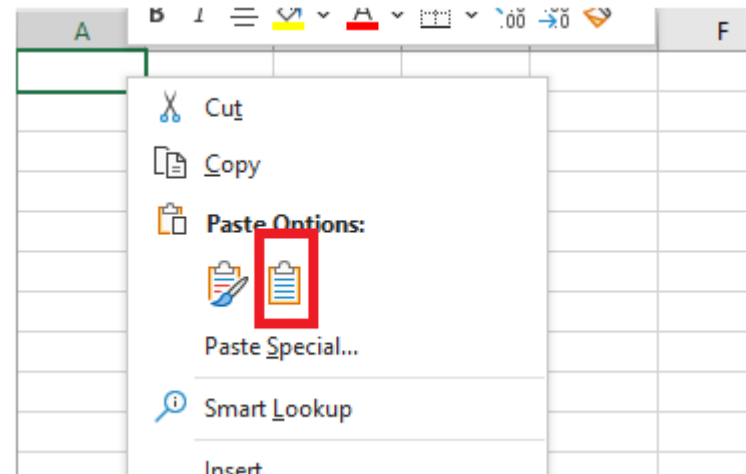
III. Next, click the A1 cell, and press CTRL + t.
This will pop up:

Make sure the box that says "My table has headers" is checked, and then press OK. Now, you have a great looking table that you can sort through easily!

Let's say you wanted to see who in your company has completed the most video courses.

IV. Click the area next to the Courses Completed header and select "Sort Largest to Smallest."
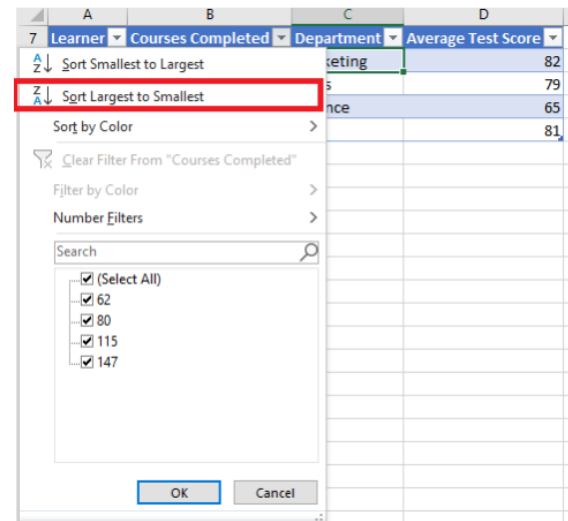
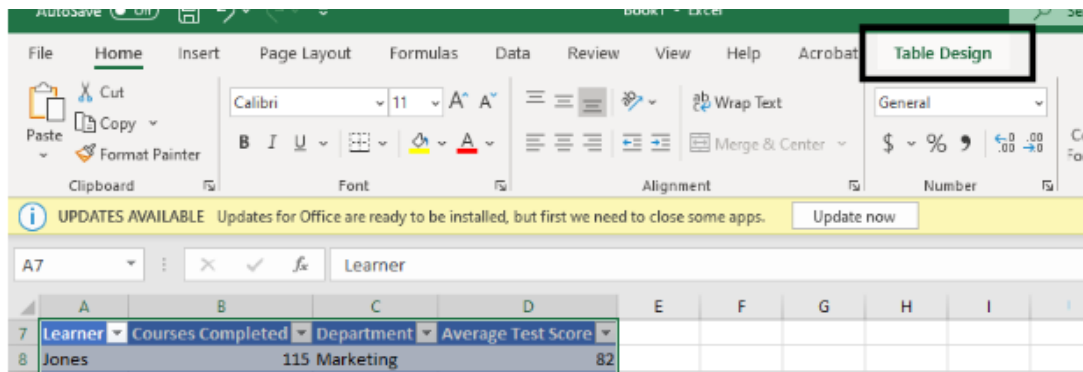**Now you can quickly see which learners have completed the most videos!**
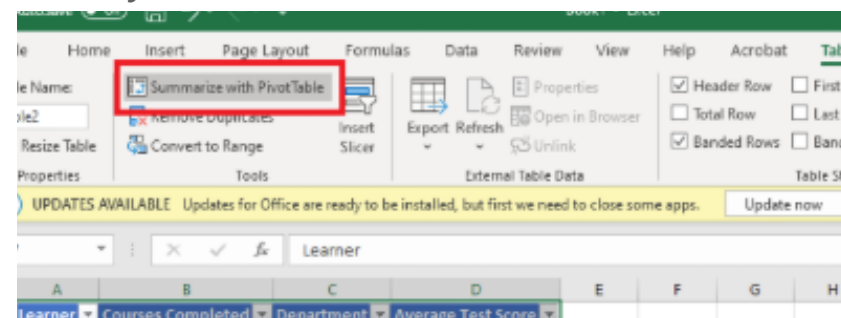
Step 2: Create a Pivot Table

Now that we have our table, we can get closer to visualizing the relationship between courses completed and average test score.

The next step is to create a pivot table.

I. First, highlight all your data. A tab called "Table Design" will populate in the navigation bar.
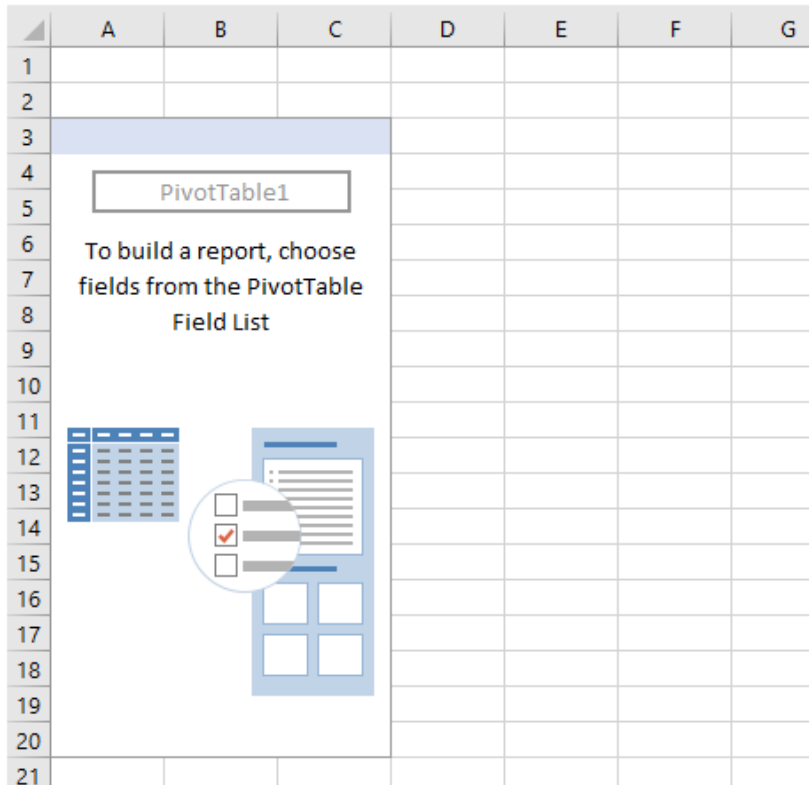

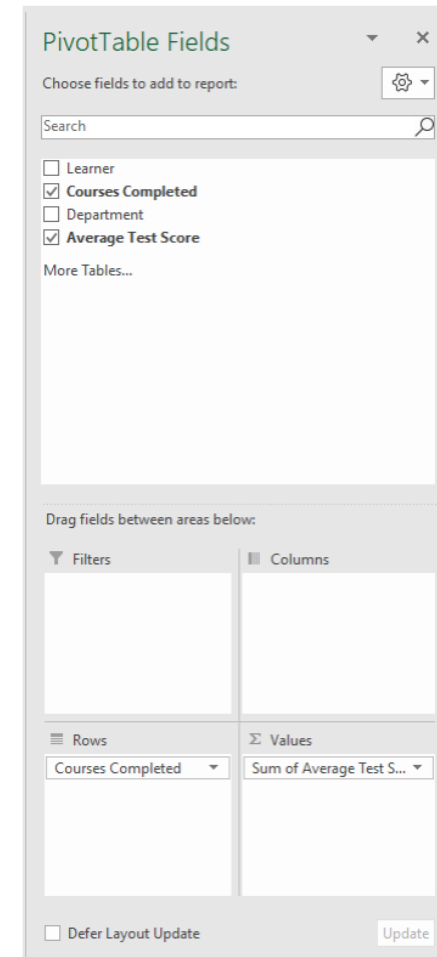**II. Click on "Summarize with PivotTable," which you'll see here:**

III. Another pop-up will appear, and you can press OK. You should now see this:

IV. On the right side is the interface where you'll create the Pivot Table.

Drag and Drop the "Courses Completed" and the "Average Test Score" entries so your interface looks like this:

V. That will populate a pivot table that looks like this:

Courses Completed	Sum of Average Test Score
62	65
80	79
115	82
147	81
Grand Total	307

This process gives us a strong breakdown, eliminating data that we don't need, and brings us closer to visualizing the relationship between Courses Completed and Average Test Score!
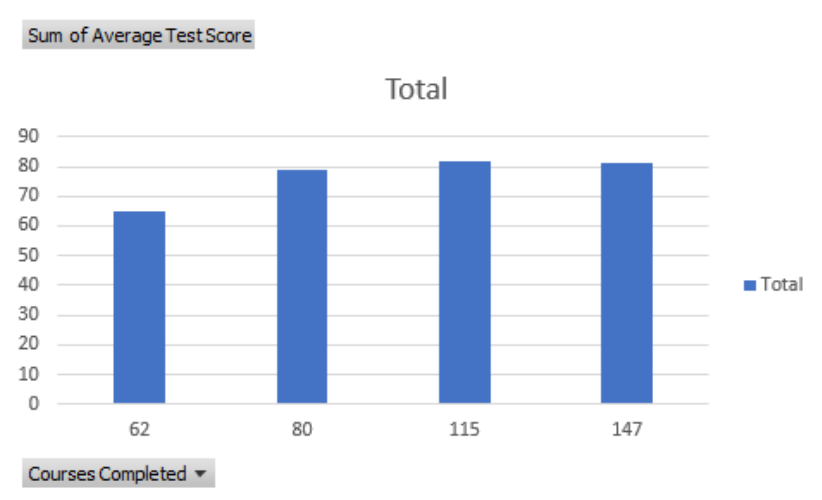
Step 3: Visualize Data with a Chart

This step is easy! Click "Insert" and then "Recommended Charts." It will look like this:
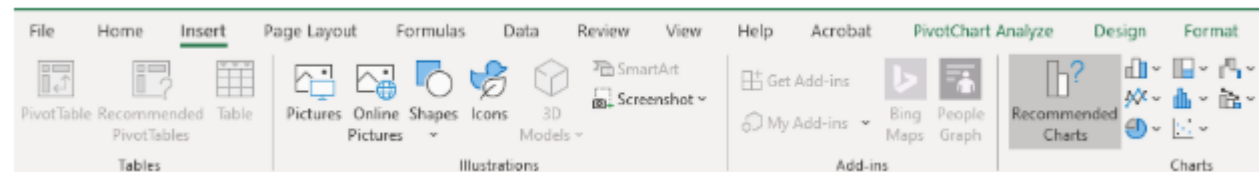
Once again, a pop-up menu will appear. Feel free to explore and look at the various types of graphs and charts you can create.

For this example, we'll stick with bar charts, since our sample size is small. Here's what we get:

Keep in mind, this was a quick guide to help you understand some more advanced parts of Excel. There are plenty of ways to improve upon this basic data visualization!

Now that you know how useful it can be, look for other ways to improve your Excel skills! BizLibrary users have access to a lot of courses on Excel, which are broken down into quick videos covering specific skills like the ones we just covered.

If you don't have access to BizLibrary, you can always request a demo to see what our content library has to offer your organization, or look online to further your education. Either way, mastering data visualization in Excel will make you an even better program manager!

Our Last Comments on Goals and Metrics

Goals and metrics are a complex topic, and when it comes to training, metrics begin and end with The Kirkpatrick Model.

We've written an in-depth ebook on this model, and if your program could use help developing a process for tracking and creating training data, please download "Unpacking Kirkpatrick: Data-Driven Decision Making in L&D."

Leadership Buy-In

The last skills that we want to highlight in this playbook are around securing leadership buy-in.

This competency relates to optimizing processes and selecting and managing resources – your leaders are surely one of your best resources!

Program managers' professional lives revolve around their program, and it can be easy to forget that leaders don't have the perspective and insight into the importance of your training program that you do.

Confidently and succinctly explaining to leaders why their investment in training is worthwhile is an important skill, and our data shows that programs that have strong leadership buy-in typically have stronger programs in terms of return on investment.

Here are some exercises you can do in preparation for having important conversations with leaders.

Make a Plan

Leaders are time-poor. You're not the only one vying for their time, so the first step is finding a good time to talk to leadership about the direction you'd like to take a program. Here are some good questions to ask yourself:

- Why do I want leadership buy-in? What am I hoping to achieve with the help of my leaders?

- Which quarter is busiest for my company? Which quarter is least busy?

- Is my leader busier in the morning or afternoon?

- Does my leader stay after hours or arrive before hours? Can I talk to them then?

Keep Your Statistics Reliable and Believable

C-level executives can receive <u>hundreds of emails each day</u>, from both inside and outside the company.

Many of those are sales emails touting over-the-top ROI claims, and over time you can believe that leaders become numb to those ridiculous claims.

With that in mind, data analysis that gives a realistic picture of what can be achieved through training is crucial. That's why one of the best ways to improve your leadership buy-in is to improve your data analytics. If you're stuck on leadership buy-in and don't know where to start, consider refining the way you collect and analyze data!

Using a Framework

Once you know what it is you're hoping to achieve through leadership buy-in, when you're going to ask, and how you're going to make your case through reliable statistics, consider modeling your pitch like this:

> *"Good (morning/afternoon), I was hoping I could take five minutes to run through some numbers with you and seek your guidance on our next step. Our last training effort was focused*

on (add a competency), and with enough work, it was successful. After talking to (stakeholder who was involved), we noticed that (behavior that changed), and because of that, (benefit that your training had on your company).

Our next focus is going to be (add your next competencies to train here). However, we will need (add your ask here, for instance: time, more budget, communication to staff, etc.). Our goal with this event is to (add benefit to your organization). Can we count on your support with organizing this training?"

Like the other frameworks, you can modify this to fit your needs. However, it's important to always drive home the benefit behind your training. Ultimately, this is the only thing your C-level leaders have time for. Details are for you to worry about, so focus on the big picture!

Putting It All Together

Refining these skills will make you a stronger program manager, and the more you develop yourself, the better results you'll be able to bring. There are a few central themes each skill has in common, and we want to take a moment to highlight these themes, and offer you resources to learn more.

LEARNING SCIENCE FOR L&D

The Facts and Figures That Matter for Your Training Program

Using best practices in your program will help you achieve better results. In this ebook, we looked at over 20 studies and analyzed them, making it easy for you to see what science says is the best way to train your employees!

VIEW EBOOK

PRACTICAL EQ

A Handbook for Developing Your Emotional Intelligence

Leadership buy-in, conversations with stakeholders – these practices both require strong people skills and emotional intelligence (EQ). From active listening to empathy, learning the soft skills and emotional intelligence to work well with others is crucial. This is a free resource you can download to develop your EQ.

VIEW EBOOK

Unpacking Kirkpatrick
DATA-DRIVEN DECISION MAKING IN L&D

Keeping reliable statistics is such an important part of the training process, and our own data tells us that this step is often overlooked. However, data-driven decision making is arguably the only way to continuously make informed decisions for your training program – this ebook will help you do it well.

VIEW EBOOK

If you're not already using BizLibrary to train your workforce, there are a number of ways our solutions can help you deliver modern learning while streamlining your own administrative tasks. Click below to learn how we can help you create a more effective training program!

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