



power boost

seven strategies

for increasing your training roi

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Big Results Can Come in Little Packages	3
Strategy One: Invest in Training that Gets Results	4
Strategy Two: Always Tell Trainees What's In It For Them	6
Strategy Three: Don't Avoid Making Trainees a Little Uncomfortable	7
Strategy Four: Tell Your Company Story to Add Depth to Your Training	9
Strategy Five: Use Incentives to Boost Training Results	10
Strategy Six: Teach Industry-Specific Terms and Acronyms	12
Strategy Seven: Include Soft Metrics When Evaluating Training Success	13

Big Results Can Come in Little Packages

This eBook is all about getting big results from simple ideas.

All the strategies it contains might sound simple, maybe even obvious. But make no mistake about it. If you apply the lessons in the pages ahead, you will realize outsize results in the ROI you receive for every training dollar you spend.

Your employees will also learn more, retain more, and apply more of what they have learned in the long term.



Strategy One: Invest in Training that Gets Results

Let's look at two professional trainers. For this article, let's call them Joan and Jack.

Both Jack and Joan are energetic trainers who get their audiences laughing. They will both do whatever it takes – using props or quacking or asking trainees to do silly things – to illustrate a concept or get their trainees excited and engaged. And when trainees leave at the end of the day, they feel energized and happy.

But there are significant differences between these two trainers. A few weeks after training is over, the performance of the people who trained with Joan has demonstrably improved. The performance of the people who trained with Jack hasn't. They quickly went back to "business as usual."

In other words, Jack's training is edutainment. Joan's isn't, because it gets results. And that is true, even though someone who peeked into either of their training rooms wouldn't notice much difference.

How Can You Avoid Wasting Money on Frivolous Training?

The first step is understanding that although good training is often entertaining, it is more than entertainment. In other words, training is supposed to achieve demonstrable results, not just make people laugh or enjoy themselves. I call the wrong kind of training edutainment. It's entertaining, it does well on the "smile sheet," but doesn't have long, impactful results.

Here are some steps that can help assure that your trainers and your training reach that goal:

- **Think of training as a strong combination of education, engagement and usefulness.**
Training must educate by teaching skills, transferring knowledge, cultivating attitudes and hitting other specific targets. Yet training that is purely educational doesn't get results. That is why training must present information in ways that are engaging, interactive and require the learner to think and use the information learned.
- **Apply the VAK model to increase learning.**
VAK stands for the three ways that people learn, and your live training should make use of all three. Visual learning happens when people watch materials that can include videos, PowerPoints, charts and other visual elements. Auditory learning happens when people learn by listening to other trainees, compelling trainers, visitors and others. And kinesthetic learning happens when people get out of their seats and move around as they take part in work simulations, games, and other meaningful exercises.

- **If you're hiring an outside trainer, speak with other organizations where her or she has worked.**

When you do, ask for specifics about what the training accomplished. Did average sales orders increase by a certain percentage? Did customers report measurably higher levels of satisfaction when they were polled? Did thefts and losses decrease by a certain significant percentage when training was completed? Remember to look for hard data about results. Statements like "We loved Paul's training!" might be nice, but they don't tell you much about whether his training was worth the money it cost.

- **Define outcomes and make sure your trainer can reach them.**

Do you want your salespeople to contact 25% more new prospects? Do you want the people who deliver and install appliances for your store to give true "white glove" treatment to customers? Or do you want your hotel front-desk staff to delight guests with exceptional service? How will your trainer reach your goals? He or she should explain his or her plans to break processes down into individual steps and hit your goals through training.

- **Help your trainer know who your trainees are.**

A good trainer will want to know about their ages, prior experience, educational level, current jobs, and all other factors that can be leveraged to engage them more fully in training. A concerned trainer will also want to be aware of any factors that might cause them not to engage.

- **Work with your trainer to develop meaningful metrics.**

If you work together to define what you will measure after training is completed, chances are good that your training will accomplish much more, because its goals are well defined.

- **Monitor sessions and make sure than training stays on track.**

If you are a company training director or a member of senior management, you might not want to attend sessions, because your presence could put a damper on trainees' ability to relax and learn. If that is the case, ask a few trainees to check in with you at lunchtime or other breakpoints to tell you whether the trainer is hitting the benchmarks you created. If not, a quick check-in with the trainer can often get things back on track and avoid wasting time and money.

It's All About Getting Your Money's Worth and Getting Results

If you are a training director who wants to record serious results from serious training, it's important to work closely with professional trainers who don't only entertain, but educate. That's the difference between training that's frivolous and training that offers a good ROI on your investment.

Strategy Two: Always Tell Trainees What's In It For Them

Evan Hackel, CEO of Tortal Training, has written a new book, *Ingaging Leadership: A new approach to leading that builds excellence and organizational success*.

Let's explore one of Evan's principles that can offer a big payback to trainers everywhere.

Be sure to communicate the "What's In It For Me" (WIIFM) when launching training

Evan writes, "People are more likely to read communications or act on them when they perceive a clear and immediate benefit from doing so."

That makes sense, doesn't it? Few people are eager to take part in training (or any other company activity) when the only incentive is, "You must finish this training by the end of the week, so log in now." But if you trumpet a clear WIIFM, participation and enthusiasm soar.

You can make that happen with communication strategies like these:

- **When announcing a new program of sales training**, say something like, "You are going to close a lot more sales, because salespeople in other locations closed 40% more sales in the first month after taking this training."
- **Before training personnel to use a new company intranet or communication hub**, say, "You are going to gain 90 minutes a day that you are now wasting by reading and sending emails . . . what will you do with all that extra time?"
- **Before training store managers to set up a new inventory management system**, say, "You'll keep your store open longer and sell more because you'll never again have to close your doors to take inventory."
- **Before training regional offices to use a new suite of marketing materials**, say, "You'll see incoming customer calls surge to 30, 40 or more a day . . . that's what happened in Des Moines and Tallahassee, and it can happen for you too."

Strategy Three: Don't Avoid Making Trainees A Little Uncomfortable

In a Breakthrough Ideas in Training webinar that Anthony Amos gave for us at Tortal, he made a comment that we've been thinking about ever since . . .

"Good training coaches people to move through discomfort."

The more we think about that comment, the more we realize how wise Anthony is. After all, discomfort is one of the main reasons people silently resist training . . .

- **Sales trainees** learn your company's strategies and scripts for structured selling . . . but some never admit that they feel uncomfortable about "asking for the buy" and closing sales.
- **Some mature trainees** who are returning to the workforce might be reluctant to admit that they feel insecure about using new technologies.
- **Executives** in your leadership training programs take part in workshops that encourage them to work closely with other departments . . . but some of them secretly feel defensive about sharing too much information with the heads of other divisions.
- **Some of the phone representatives** who you are training to make cold sales calls never admit they hate to pick up the phone and call people they don't know.

Dealing with Discomfort

Before you can overcome discomfort, you should find ways to uncover where it lies. Here are some effective strategies:

- **Start asking for "mood feedback" as soon as training begins.**
Asking a question like, "everybody good with that?" or, "anybody got a problem with that?" consistently through training can set up an atmosphere that encourages trainees to open up about any areas of discomfort. If you keep the mood lighthearted and fun, trainees will be more likely to say what is on their minds.
- **Anticipate and deal with possible "hot button" issues when designing your training.**
If you think about who your trainees are and what you would like them to learn, you can often identify areas of discomfort ahead of time and teach to them.

It's All About Getting Your Money's Worth and Getting Results

- **Use simulations.**
If a trainee for a calling center job says that she fears dealing with angry customers, let her handle two or three simulated calls from dissatisfied customers. (Other trainees can play the part of the callers.) Once she sees that she can handle those calls well, she will gain the confidence she needs.
- **Use videos in your training.**
If you can show employees dealing with situations or issues that you expect will cause trainees discomfort on the job, you can proactively train employees to perform better.
- **Let trainees break into small sub-groups to discuss what they are learning.**
Trainees who are reluctant to air fears or concerns before a room full of other trainees are often willing to share their feelings in small groups of their peers. One good technique is to ask each group to appoint a leader to collect comments and then report them to the entire training class.
- **Consider using anonymous feedback.**
You can ask trainees to anonymously write down their areas of discomfort on index cards, or have them text the training leader. Once those comments are collected, your trainer can talk about them openly with the entire group.
- **Be respectful of trainees' feelings.**
You want to keep the mood light, but resist the temptation to poke fun at trainees' fears. If a trainee opens up about something that is on his or her mind – something that is a concern – part of a trainer's job is to discuss the issue respectfully and carefully.

Strategy Four: Tell Your Company Story to Add Depth to Your Training

If you were creating a training program for Apple, would you fail to mention Steve Jobs? If you were designing training for Walmart sales associates, would you forget to mention Sam Walton – the visionary company founder who reinvented customer service? And if you were training personnel to work at Disney theme parks, would you leave out Mickey Mouse, Minnie Mouse . . . or Walt himself?

Of course not. Their stories are part of the DNA that lives on in the companies they founded. And what about your company's DNA? Who was your founder, for example, and what prompted him or her to start the firm? Every company, including yours, has a story. It was started with a purpose, it has a reason for being, and it has a story that should be told.

If you take even a little time to talk about your founders and your history – especially when training new employees – your training immediately improves, for some very practical reasons:

- **Employees immediately become a team.**
They're no longer people who just show up and start working. They understand that they are part of something that is bigger, and that adds conviction to what they do.
- **They immediately learn important lessons about company values and priorities.**
Maybe you work for a bank that was founded after World War II to help returning soldiers buy their first homes or open new businesses. Or perhaps 150 years ago your founder invented a piece of equipment that turned your region into a center of agriculture. Or your founder is a social activist who launched your company with a big idea to help the world. Those are important stories. Whatever yours is, why not take a little time to tell it in your training? The lessons people learn are more than nice to know – they train employees how to make practical decisions that are in line with company values and ethics.
- **They gain a repertoire of stories to take out with them into the world.**
Salespeople gain the ability to talk about your company, its founders, and what you stand for. Executives can talk about your company with pride when they interact with leaders of other companies. Even customer service representatives and other front-line personnel can project deeply held company values and attitudes.

And here's another training tip . . .

Why tell your company story with words alone, when historical photos of your founder or early company facilities can give trainees a compelling sense of how your firm got started? Images offer a powerful way to turn "dry history" into more powerful training.

Strategy Five: Use Incentives to Boost Training Results

Should you offer incentives to the employees who are taking part in your training, or who complete it successfully?

“What a great idea,” one trainer tells us. “Some organizations forget to incentivize people for using what they learn in training programs, but it can be a very effective way to reinforce learning.”

Yet we’ve heard some dissenting opinions too. “I think it’s redundant,” a sales trainer says. “When people start applying what they learned, the benefits should be self-rewarding in terms of closing more sales, earning bigger commissions, and helping the company succeed.”

Who is Right?

While there is a kernel of truth in what the “redundant” trainer is saying, we know the “great idea” commentator is right. “Mr. Redundant,” we think, is misunderstanding what incentives can be and how they can augment training.

Here are some ways to use incentives to increase your training results and ROI:

- Make incentives ongoing and meaningful.**
 We have seen trainers hand out key chains and t-shirts at the close of training sessions. There’s nothing wrong with that – it’s a nice and motivational thing to do – but it only produces lasting effects if more incentives are delivered strategically over time. For example, you can reward employees every time they complete future training lessons, modules and courses.
- Use technology to deliver rewards.**
 If your employees are doing their training on mobile phones, you can deliver a prepaid restaurant or store coupon to them after they complete each unit. Delivery can be automated, built right into your training program.
- Don’t shy away from big rewards and prizes.**
 Family vacation packages for employees can work well to motivate them to sell the most of a new product in a specific period after they have been trained to sell it, for example. (Just be sure to clearly explain the rules: exactly how much they need to sell, the precise closing date and time when the competition ends, how many of the incentives will be offered, etc. Spelling out the specifics prevents later misunderstandings or hurt feelings.)
- Remember that simple encouragement can be a great incentive too.**
 A personalized note or email of encouragement or thanks from a company leader can be a great motivator – and it doesn’t cost a penny. Remember, however, that effective motivational communications should be specific, not general. Example: An email that says, “Congratulations Bob on bringing in 25 new clients by using our new marketing platform” is more powerful than a generic message that only says, “Thank you for trying our new marketing platform.”

- **Honors and recognition are effective incentives too.**

If certain employees achieve excellent results by using your training, you can invite them to join a new Training Advisory Panel, an Honors Circle or another committee that you have created.

- **Use incentives to encourage feedback in the months after training is completed.**

Employees might (or might not) respond to an email that says, "Please let us know how you are using what you learned in our training program last month." But chances are good that they will respond if you offer even a small incentive. Prepaid restaurant and store coupons are good choices here too.

- **Offer incentives for suggestions.**

They are an effective way to solicit feedback for improving future training. The result can be continuous improvement that leads to better and better training results and ROI.

Strategy Six: Teach Industry-Specific Terms and Acronyms

If you take a moment to think back on the last few meetings you've attended, you will remember all the industry-specific terms, abbreviations and acronyms that were flying around the room. Now try to imagine how much you would have understood or contributed if you had no idea what all that "lingo" meant. And imagine what could happen if your employees finished your training programs without learning what those terms mean. Would your salespeople be able to discuss customer needs effectively and close sales? Would new managers be able to communicate effectively with vendors, company outsiders – or even the people they supervise?

There are other benefits to including current terms in your training too. While you are planning your training programs, it pays you to ask, "What are the latest terms we need to talk about?" That question can help you quickly uncover any "thin" training areas that you might have been overlooking, such as new technologies and trends.

Use Professional Journals and Organizations to Identify the Terms You Need to Teach

Of course, you know most of the new terms and acronyms that other professionals are using in your industry. But to be sure you are not overlooking any new jargon, review these sources too:

- **Industry-specific journals** that are widely read in your field..
- **Programs for conferences and trade shows** where keynoters and other presenters are discussing the latest need-to-know trends and terms.

Build Critical Terms into Your Training

If you are looking for a training development company, be sure to ask whether their training materials and course content can be customized to include the latest industry information and terminology. Remember that even off-the-shelf training products should be customizable to meet your needs.

Strategy Seven: Include Soft Metrics when Evaluating Training Success

Because the first aim of training is to improve the way people do things, all training programs measure hard metrics after training is done:

- Are our salespeople making **more sales calls, closing more sales**, or increasing the **size of the average order**.
- Have our product assemblers **increased their output** and **reduced the number of quality defects**?
- Are our phone reps now resolving **more customer issues** on the first call?
- How many more **positive reviews** are we getting online?
- Six months after training ends, are more customers **placing repeat orders**.

Without metrics like those, how will you know whether your training has achieved its goals or repaid your investment?

What about Soft Metrics

Soft metrics have to do less with observable performance, and more to do with attitudes. They too are measured before and after training to evaluate results. Some examples:

- Do members of your hotel's front desk staff **feel calmer and more confident** about resolving customer complaints.
- Do your new hires now feel **more enthusiastic about working for your company** than they did before training began?
- Do employees now expect to **remain at your company** for longer periods of time?
- Has training improved **employees' attitudes**?

Soft metrics can help predict how "sticky" your training will be. For example, employees who feel dramatically more committed to your company will be less likely to fall back into old patterns in the months after training ends.

Another reason to measure soft metrics is that they help you identify any extra benefits your training achieved. The primary purpose of your training was to teach your restaurant workers to deliver better customer service, for example, but they also became bigger believers in your brand.

The Art of Measuring Soft Metrics

There is an incorrect assumption that it is difficult to collect data on soft metrics. In fact, soft metrics can be measured by having trainees complete surveys or have interviews with members of your training or HR team.

Another way to gauge soft metrics is to measure behaviors. After training your call center staffers, for example, do they arrive more punctually and call in sick less often? That could indicate improved motivation and morale. Or after training your retail salespeople, has the rate of their retention improved after six months or a year? That could indicate that your training made their jobs less stressful and more satisfying.

Mixing the Hard with the Soft Yields a Fuller Picture or Results

When evaluating training success, it is not a question of measuring hard metrics versus soft metrics. Why not measure both? Think of them as different tiles in a larger mosaic that yields a picture of everything your training is accomplishing.