New Hire Training:
Behavioral Approach can Lead to Significant Training ROI

By Tom Spencer, Ph.D.

With the economy on the upswing and new jobs not far behind, organizations will once again be significantly investing in new-hire training. Will they turn to conventional methods that leave new employees underprepared and the organization's training ROI low? Or will they use behavioral methods that build knowledge and skill fluency, ensuring a rapid transfer of training to the workplace?

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– Tom Spencer

Costs associated with onboarding new employees often go well beyond initial training to include weeks or even months of "learning on the job." This is especially true when the initial training focuses on general orientation information not linked to what the employees will be paid to do and accomplish. Training that doesn't directly improve workplace performance is a waste of time and money. Organizations that use a behavioral approach to training ensure a streamlined focus on what matters to the organization and what will directly impact business results.

WHAT DOES A BEHAVIORAL APPROACH TO TRAINING LOOK LIKE?

Training developed to cover critical content is the first step. Trainers often pack so much information into training that the participants have difficulty figuring out what they "need-to-know" versus what is "nice-to-know." Content must be applicable only to how the employee does his or her job, which may also include how and when they interact with other individuals or departments.

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!

Training that incorporates meaningful practice and application will greatly increase the opportunity for the employee to learn, retain and act on what's really important for them to do or do differently in their job. By simulating real-life situations, employees can put themselves in the job and understand how their decision-making will lead them to the most productive outcome.

REINFORCE THE RIGHT BEHAVIOR IN THE WORKPLACE.

A behavioral approach to training will not be enough unless the right consequences are built into the natural work environment. Consequences must support the skills trained. The behavior gets started in the classroom but it's only through measurement, feedback and reinforcement that the desired behavior will keep going in the workplace. The result is performance mastery and fluency that accelerates your overall business performance.
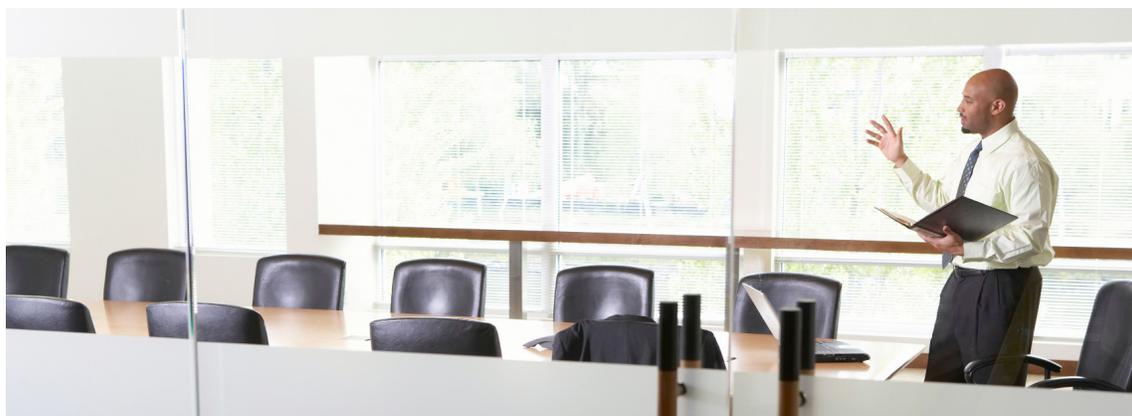
CASE STUDY

Take for example, a medical insurance company that was in need of streamlining its new hire training for underwriters, claims processors, and call center representatives. Their current training program, primarily lecture-based, was costly to implement and delivering mixed results. The company invested in integrating a behavioral approach to training by redesigning three new hire courses, building fluency in key job tasks, and developing a plan to measure the impact of the redesign on job performance. In addition, they developed a core group of internal staff to be skilled in course redesign and fluency-based learning so they could take ownership of training going forward.

The training redesign process refocused on the primary job tasks and the knowledge required to perform those tasks correctly and without hesitation (fluently). The redesign replaced much of the lecture format of the existing courses with hundreds to thousands of opportunities to practice components of the critical job tasks in a way that produced accuracy and speed in the full job tasks. The learning format included traditional classroom instruction, online knowledge fluency training, computer system drills, and job task and process drills that required the integrated use of medical knowledge, online resources, computer applications, and communication skills.

The design and development of each of the courses required coordination and communication with internal stakeholder groups (e.g., Human Resources, operations, nursing staff) and a review of and revisions to the online resources that supported the job positions addressed.

Student progress was tracked with individual scorecards that summarized their performance on classroom exercises and tests. Students also charted their accuracy and speed of responding for each practice exercise so they could monitor their performance improvement. At the end of each day, the instructor reviewed the students' charts and performance scorecards.

The intended results of each course redesign were to reduce the length of the new hire training, better align the course content with the job process, and increase the amount and relevance of the practice so that new hires would perform as well as seasoned employees more quickly than they had in the past. Actual results from the redesign of the underwriting course alone yielded a **reduction in classroom training time by 15 days (or 34%), a reduction in post-training time from 26 to 3 weeks, a 43% improvement in After Call Wrap (ACW) performance, and significant improvement in Quality Assessment Scores of new hires in the first 5 weeks post-training.**

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[About the Author]

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As President and CEO of Aubrey Daniels International (ADI), Tom actively works with ADI staff and clients to create positive change and achieve desired business goals. For nearly 25 years, his experience and ideas have shaped pragmatic and integrated approaches to applying the science of behavior to the workplace. Tom has written extensively on topics related to leadership, consequence management, performance fluency, and technology development. When not leading ADI, Tom enjoys trail running and following the WVU Mountaineers.

[About ADI]

Regardless of your industry or expertise, one thing remains constant: People power your business. Since 1978 Aubrey Daniels International (ADI) has been dedicated to accelerating the business and safety performance of companies worldwide by using positive, practical approaches grounded in the science of behavior and engineered to ensure long-term sustainability. ADI provides clients with the tools and methodologies to help move people toward positive, results-driven accomplishments. Our clients accelerate strategy execution while fostering employee engagement and positive ac-countability at all levels of their organization.

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