

STICKINESS

A White Paper On Skills Retention and Synthesis



How to Make Your Training Stick

Solutions for **Standing Out**



by creating world-class customer experiences

How To Make Training Stick

The Belding Group of Companies Inc.

Revised: November 2015

Author: Shaun Belding, CEO



Table of Contents

| Topic | Page |
|--|-------------|
| The Ten Criteria For Stickiness | 3 |
| What We Know And What We Do | 4 |
| Changing What We Know | 5 |
| Changing What People Do | 13 |
| The Challenge For Learning & Development Professionals | 17 |
| About The Belding Group | 19 |

How To Make Training Stick

The Belding Group of Companies Inc.

Revised: November 2015

The Million Dollar Question

How do we get training to stick? It's the million dollar question. Experts have long ago agreed that the interminable hours long dissertations and lectures are as ineffective as they are tedious. And with today's training culture so focused on measurability, the question of skills retention and synthesis, or "stickiness", is more relevant than ever.



This Paper Identifies Ten Criteria To Creating Stickiness In Training:

1. Train using visual, auditory, kinaesthetic and tactile tools
2. Make skills relevant and related
3. Use low density classes
4. Use short classes and short modules
5. Repeat the message often
6. Keep the message consistent
7. Provide the learner with motivation
8. Provide the learner with confidence
9. Provide the learner with expectations
10. Provide the learner with support

What We Know, And What We Do

Stickiness, as it relates to training, essentially involves two different elements – retention of the information being presented; and synthesizing the skills – putting them into practice in a live environment. They are two quite different concepts, and one does not necessarily follow the other.

It is quite likely, for example, that US President Bill Clinton *knew* that fidelity was important to both his marriage and his career, and he *knew* what fidelity was. What he did, of course, was quite a different story. I *know* that I'm supposed to keep my head down when I'm golfing, but...

Training that actually translates into habitual behaviours in a live environment, therefore, must address both what people know and what people do. They are two separate and distinct outcomes, and need to be treated as such.



Memory And Skills Retention – Changing What We Know

A great number of studies have been conducted regarding how we process and store information, as well as on the effectiveness of different instructional approaches in facilitating the transfer of information into short- and long-term memory. What is clear are two things:



1. Learning Styles

Individuals differ greatly in learning styles, and that retention is proportionate to the appropriateness of the instructional approach.

2. Training Design

Beyond learning styles, there are some common denominators in training design that more effectively create retention of concepts and knowledge.

"We remember what we understand; we understand only what we pay attention to; we pay attention to what we want."

- Edward Bolles

Memory And Skills Retention – Changing What We Know

Learning Styles

The generally accepted principle in learning and development circles is that there are four fundamental learning styles: Visual, Auditory, Tactile and Kinaesthetic. Solid evidence exists that there is a direct causal relation to how well instruction matches a learners learning style, and how much information is retained.



Beware Unsupported Statistics

There are a lot of common, but unsupported statistics that typically get cited regarding which learning styles have the greatest impact. Unfortunately, when instructional designers rely on these numbers, it can potentially limit the effectiveness of a training program.

The reality is that, in order to maximize retention within a mixed group of learners, *all four* learning styles must be addressed. A 2002 survey of students by the Lewis Center for Educational Research in California gives us an indication as to the proportion of learners to learning styles:

| Learning Style | # of students | Percentage |
|------------------------|---------------|------------|
| Visual | 167 | 29% |
| Auditory | 123 | 22% |
| Auditory/Visual | 76 | 13% |
| Tactile | 57 | 10% |
| Kinaesthetic | 54 | 10% |
| Visual/ Tactile | 35 | 6% |
| Visual/Kinaesthetic | 23 | 4% |
| Kinaesthetic/ Auditory | 14 | 3% |
| Kinaesthetic/Tactile | 12 | 2% |
| Auditory/Tactile | 7 | 1% |

Memory And Skills Retention – Changing What We Know

Learning Styles

Visual & Auditory Messaging Is A Must

To ensure information and skills retention, therefore, the primary training methodology must involve, *at minimum*, both visual and auditory elements. This will reach 65% of learners. To address the remaining 35% of learners, both tactile and kinaesthetic elements must also be included.



A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words

The importance of visual learning has been well documented. In 1997, for example, Ollerenshaw, Alison, Aidman, Eugene, & Kidd, Garry conducted a study that demonstrated clearly the positive impact of visual learning.

More importantly, as Park & Gabrieli established in 1995, *pictures are inevitably remembered better than words on tasks of recall and recognition*. This is important to remember in the design of a training program.

But Stickiness Comes From Tactile And Kinaesthetic Learning

A more important consideration is that, although 65% of learners are visual or auditory, ***tactile and kinaesthetic approaches are required to create stickiness***. In 1996, Ellis, Whitehill, & Irick established that getting hands-on experience was even better than pictures. In their study, they found that memory of pictures is significantly less than memory of interaction with operating and assembling an actual device.



Memory And Skills Retention – Changing What We Know

Training Design

In addition to ensuring that learning styles are addressed, the content and structural design of a learning program are critical to optimizing retention of skills and concepts.

There are four considerations that must be addressed to ensure that a training program is effective.



1. Relevance and Relatedness

The more relevance with which the content is presented, the greater the retention.

2. Low Density

Retention of concepts and skills is indirectly proportional to the amount of content in a training program.

3. Short Modules, Short Classes

Shorter modules and classes are significantly more effective than longer ones.

4. Repetition

Consistency, repetition, and the spacing of repetition play a profound role in the stickiness of a program's content.

Memory And Skills Retention – Changing What We Know

Training Design

Content Must Be Both Relevant And Related

The more relevant the subject matter is to the learner, the more likely it is to be retained. When the information is addressing a current need, recall is inevitably better. The tendency to retain information is, in fact, directly proportional to the immediateness and perceived importance of the learner's needs.



For instance, most people will quickly memorize and retain the personal identification number for their bank card, but would not do as well memorizing their driver's licence number. There is a reason for this.

The need for memorizing a PIN number is important – for a number of reasons. It is also immediate – something someone will likely need to have top of mind in the short term.

Memorizing a driver's licence is far less important – because it is easy to access, and not a number that one commonly uses.

Relatedness is also important. Borowsky & Besner in 1993 established that words as well as pictures are read or understood faster when preceded by a related context. For instance, it is easier to remember the word "butter" when it comes after "bread" than when it comes after "doctor". This impacts the sequential requirements of training design, as well as the need to have conducted a thorough participant analysis.



Memory And Skills Retention – Changing What We Know

Training Design

Dramatically Reduce Content

Although much is said about the “less is more” theory, it is rarely practiced in training course design. There is a great deal of research to indicate that low density training – training which focuses on fewer learning objectives – is far more effective than training that “covers a lot of ground.”

No more than 50% of material presented should be new

A 1984 study by Russell, Hendricson, & Herbert, graphically demonstrates that no more than 50% of material presented should be new, and that the rest of class time should be devoted to material or activities designed to reinforce the material in learners’ minds.



This principle was supported in 1997, when Shadmehr and Holcomb (“Neural correlates of motor memory consolidation”) illustrated the importance of simplicity

in establishing retention. People who learn and master a skill (A) and then immediately learn and master a second skill (B), performed poorly when skill A was performed 5 hours later. People who learned a skill (A), waited five hours, learned a second skill (B), and then waited five hours were able to perform both skills successfully.

Memory And Skills Retention – Changing What We Know

Training Design

Shorter Class Hours & Punchier Modules

It has been shown many times that the average adult attention span in a learning environment is about 15 minutes, and that modules within a program should not exceed that time limit. As with the low density principle, studies have also shown that retention of key learning points does not significantly increase from a full-day to a half-day program – and can actually *decrease* depending on the density of the program.

Repeat, Repeat, Repeat

Repetition is a key component to moving information from short-term memory to long term memory.



The Fading Effect

H.F. Spitzer, in his prominent 1939 study on memory retention, demonstrated how memory fades. He showed how, when information was taught, but unsupported, recall diminished over time:

| Time from First Learning | % of Material Remembered | % of Material Forgotten |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| After 1 day | 54% | 46% |
| After 7 days | 35% | 65% |
| After 14 days | 21% | 79% |
| After 21 days | 18% | 82% |
| After 28 days | 19% | 81% |
| After 63 days | 17% | 83% |

Memory And Skills Retention – Changing What We Know

Training Design

Repeat, Repeat, Repeat (Cont'd)



Spitzer's research highlighted two clear points: First, that regular reinforcement of information is critical to combat fading. The second is that, even unsupported, a residual portion of information will remain in memory over time. This supports the principle that the impact of training over time is in fact cumulative.

This principle has been supported in a number of subsequent studies. The gradual increase in retention created by successive repetition was demonstrated by Atkinson in 1968 and Bernbach again in 1971, In his "Economics of learning," P.A.Wozniak again proved that repetition is important, as is the spacing of repetition.

A Consistent Message Is Critical

It is also critical to maintain consistency of message and avoid confusion. Given Russell, Hendricson, & Herbert's finding's that no more than 50% of material should be new to ensure retention, changes in messaging on a single topic can be counterproductive.



Practical Application & Skills Synthesis: Changing What We Do

For a learner to apply skills in a live environment there are several elements that must be in place. As previously mentioned, simply having a skill does not necessarily translate into using a skill.

For example, imagine your employer sent you to break-dancing school. You have no real interest in break-dancing, but you were informed that going to the class was

mandatory. Chances are, you are not going to automatically start doing your break-dancing routines in the office, even though you now have the information and skill to do so if you wished.

For a skill to become a *practice* – applied on a consistent basis, there are four key elements that need to be in place: **Motivation, Expectation, Confidence & Relentless Support.**



Practical Application & Skills Synthesis: Changing What We Do

1. Motivation

The more compelling the motivation – the more clear the reason is for doing something – the more likely a skill will be applied.

For example, tell the administrator-turned-break-dancer that he'll get an extra \$5 a week to do a dance routine in the office, he would still likely turn it down. He might consider it, however, if he were told it would result in a promotion to vice president.



To be effective, training needs to clearly identify the “why’s” and the “What’s in it for me’s.” The appeal can be to external motivators, such as financial incentives, positive reinforcement, contests, etc., or internal motivators, which are more permanent and persuasive. Dan Pink, in his bestselling and paradigm-challenging book, “Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us,” identifies *Autonomy, Mastery & Purpose* as the core components of internal motivation.

2. Expectation

Retention of new concepts and skills is increased dramatically when they are tied to expectations or non-negotiable performance standards. People will focus on the things that they know are being monitored and measured by a superior.

Training programs that contribute to the greatest change are those that aligned with organizational KPIs and clear expectations at the leadership level. This supports the critical need for strong collaboration between learning and development and organizational leadership.

Practical Application & Skills Synthesis: Changing What We Do

3. Confidence

When a skill is new, people often lack the confidence to make change. The more confident we are in the value of the skills, as well as in our abilities to execute them, the more comfortable we will be trying them. The break-dancer will be more likely to try a routine if he is confident that it will be accepted and that he will do it well.

Instilling confidence involves both the design and delivery of a training program. The design of a program must include components that allows participants to practice the skills and have success with them. The facilitator needs to celebrate successful attempts to execute a skill, and help learners visualize success in a live environment.



Practical Application & Skills Synthesis: Changing What We Do

4. Relentless Support

People will be more likely to continue trying to develop more skills in a live environment when they are being consistently *assisted* and *encouraged*. This requires coaching, and the attention of direct supervisors. The break-dancer will be more likely to try if he is being encouraged, and if he knows that there is someone there to provide guidance.

From a learning and development perspective, this again reinforces the importance of strong collaboration with organizational leadership, as well as training to ensure that managers and supervisors have the skill and expectation to provide this support.

The Importance of FeedForward

The traditional process of coaching and support is heavily dependent on feedback. The more productive approach is one of *feed-forward*. Unlike feedback, where an employee is presented with past performance that was not up to standard, *feed-forward* does not. With *feed-forward*, a manager will continuously provide tips and guidance for future interactions *without reference to the past*. This creates a more positive environment, without creating defensiveness or reducing confidence.



The Biggest Challenge For Learning Professionals

Stickiness – the permanent transfer of new concepts, and shaping of new behaviours – is created by ensuring that these ten criteria are met. And it only takes one of the criteria to be missing to have a significant negative impact on the stickiness of a training program.

The difficulty in attaining stickiness is that the people typically charged with Learning & Development rarely, if ever, have control over all of the criteria. A well designed and executed customer service training program, for example, can be marginalized by the absence of enforced performance standards.



The difficulty in attaining stickiness is that the people typically charged with Learning & Development rarely, if ever, have control over all of the criteria.

The other challenge is the pressures on L&D to try and keep people “on the cutting edge.” Many people are reluctant to champion sticky-friendly training because it can be perceived as lacking the forward motion that befits a progressive company.

The Biggest Challenge For Learning Professionals

(Continued)

Proposing that you trim your annual training initiatives from a dozen to two is a hard sell. Going back to people with training that covers half of the same learning points as the last two sessions can appear unimaginative and unambitious to senior management. Not plugging in those three or four extra key learning points to fill out a session is a hard temptation to resist. Intentions to move away from full-day training to half-day training easily falls victim to the “that’s the format we always use” syndrome.

Maximizing training stickiness requires buy-in to the ten criteria at all levels within an organization. It requires a clear, consistent and committed focus to singular training goals.

It means planning training with overlapping skills – ie. your Dealing with Difficult Customer training program should also reinforce the skills of the Customer Service campaign introduced six months earlier.

It requires diligence and follow-through at application level. Like an automobile engine, each moving part must work both independently and interdependently toward a common goal.



About The Belding Group of Companies Inc.

The Belding Group has been helping companies stand out with customer experience for 24 years. It has two divisions that provide consulting, training and measurement in customer service, workplace performance and leadership. It has two divisions:



Belding Training designs, develops and delivers customer service training, leadership training and workplace performance. Belding Training has earned accolades globally, and has won international awards for the innovation, effectiveness and results of its programs.



RetailTrack conducts mystery shopping and customer and employee satisfaction surveys throughout North America. RetailTrack's unique approach provides critical insights that help companies identify opportunities for Standing Out in Customer Experience.



To learn more about The Belding Group and the services we offer, contact us at:

1 (613) 836-3559

1 (800) 576-6860

info@beldinggroup.com

