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Developing Workplace Excellence

The **7 DEADLIEST** Mistakes Training Managers Make When Providing a Training Program

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JER HR Group

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You want your training programs to hit the mark. You want them to get the results you need. And you want to receive accolades from participants. But how can you make sure you are providing best practice programs you can be sure will do that?

Below please find 7 deadly mistakes that will derail your best of intentions. You want to make sure to avoid these common mistakes at all costs in order for your training programs to accomplish the results you want.

Deadly Mistake No. 1: Not Gaining and Providing Visible Senior Leadership Support

Before your first participant enters the training room, it is important that they know the program is supported by senior leadership. They not only need to know the Purpose of the program, and the Agenda, they need to know it's Value and Importance so they can internally justify their own reasons for wanting to be there.

You want to identify the key training need the program is designed to address, and find ways to demonstrate visible senior leadership support for attendance. Some best practice ways you can take to make leadership support more visible include:

- **Introductory Welcome Comments:** Look for a senior leader who has high credibility to welcome the participants and talk about why it is important they are attending. This senior leader should want to be an internal champion for the course, and support you in the process.
- **Introductory Welcome Video from the CEO:** When possible, this can be another way to show senior leadership support. In cases when the CEO is not available to welcome the participants, this can be a viable option for increasing visible leadership support for the course.
- **Introductory Welcome Letter from the CEO:** A Welcome Letter can be placed in the front of each participant workbook, to once again show visible support from your organization's CEO.
- **Dinner attendance with class participants and the executive leadership team:** If applicable or you are providing a multi-day program, inviting several members from the Executive Team can show support to leadership participants in the program. Participants can submit questions to executives in advance that can be answered during dinner conversation. Participants not only get their questions answered, they greatly value the time and focus they receive from the executive team members.

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Deadly Mistake No. 2: Not Customizing the Program

The purpose of any learning solution is to fulfill a unique need your organization has at this point in time. Your organization is unique, your people are unique and the target of each training program should be unique. Therefore, make sure to always provide customized, tailored solutions so that they meet the unique needs of the learners. Some ways you can do this include:

- **Provide Modules that Address the Learning Needs of Your Population:** Assess the needs of your learners in advance, and then identify the topics that will best fit your learners' needs. You can do this through conversations with key stakeholders and sample participants. More formal needs assessments and surveys can also aid in this process.
- **Customized Scenarios for Role Play Situations:** Role play is an important element of skill development. The more you can use customized scenarios that match the learner's work situation and experience, the better they will be able to apply the concepts addressed back on the job. Make sure to thoroughly interview people who can specifically describe the unique challenges of your learners and then craft role play situations that reflect that. As an alternative, you can also encourage each learner to prepare their own role play that is unique to a situation they are facing now.
- **Customized Simulations and Games:** Simulations that reflect the learners' challenges in an interactive way provide a robust climate for learning. The more you are able to incorporate those elements into your simulations and games, the better.
- **Customized Case Study:** Creating a customized case study at the end of your program can provide learners with an opportunity to apply all the concepts addressed during the class to their working environment and experience. This amplifies the learning experience by demonstrating to participants how much they have learned, while also helping them identify how these concepts can best be applied. This is one exercise we highly recommend you incorporate, and it is critical that it be customized to reflect the experience of your participant group and organization.

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Deadly Mistake No. 3: Not Making the Program a Process vs. an Event

One common deadly pitfall of many well-intentioned training managers, is to put a lot of effort into providing a program and then to stop there. In other words, they create a learning experience that is only a one-time event and does not include ample reinforcement resources and activities afterwards.

To achieve real and lasting results, learning needs to be a continual process that helps the participant establish new skills and behaviors over time. There are a host of blended learning resources that can reinforce your learning concepts and encourage transfer of learning back on the job.

Some of those resources include:

- **Reinforcement Follow-Up Meetings:** These can be provided in person if your participant group is centrally located, or by web meeting if they are geographically dispersed. The follow-up meetings generally last no longer than an hour and can be designed to quickly review the key learning concepts addressed, while asking participants to describe actions taken since class and lessons learned. We suggest scheduling these out at intervals throughout the year in order to keep the learning fresh. The more interactive they are, the better.
- **Reinforcement Newsletters:** These should be designed to provide quick, short reminders of key concepts addressed in your program. You want to customize them to address the concepts from your class, and make them easy to scan for reminder tips and techniques. One nice element to include is a photo of the participant's class at the top of each newsletter.
- **On-Demand eLearning Courses:** If you create short, eLearning courses regarding some of the key concepts from your program, these can be not just excellent reinforcement tools, but also on-demand, just-in-time resources for further access in the future. We suggest sending these out at spaced intervals after the program is over to aid in the reinforcement process.
- **Books and Articles:** Related books and articles can be provided to participants after the class to further support the learning process. These, also, should be spaced intermittently throughout the year in order.

Deadly Mistake No. 4: Not Planning for Implementation

The most important thing is not what happens in the classroom, it is what happens after it is over. Therefore, it is critical to help prepare each learner for implementation of the learning concepts back on the job. For leadership training, this can easily be done by asking each participant to create a Leadership Development Plan during class. This should be a separate document that can be detached from their participant binder and is designed for easy review and discussion after the course is over. It should be designed to include:

- **Action Ideas from Each Learning Module:** Participants should always be encouraged to record the ideas they personally want to implement as you progress through each module of your program.
- **Action Ideas from Each Assessment Provided:** Assessment instruments can provide rich learning experiences for your participants. Their purpose, however, is not to just provide insight. Their real purpose is to enable change. So each learner should record the changes they plan to implement from this insight in their Leadership Development Plan.
- **Discussion with the Participant's Immediate Manager:** One of the most important elements of learning transfer is the ability for each learner to report their learning plan to their manager after the program is over. The manager should coach the learner to continue to implement their learning plan on a consistent basis. The development of a learning plan and the discussion that ensues afterwards is a demonstration of the learner's commitment to their own professional development. The manager's involvement is also a commitment to the learner and the organization in the process.

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Deadly Mistake No. 5: Not Building in Accountability

You've probably heard it said that "What gets measured, gets done". One other way to think about this is "What gets reported, gets done". One deadly mistake in the design of a learning program is to inadvertently leave the learner with the impression that they really are not expected to implement the program. In other words, no one will know if they don't.

We know that the most profound behavior modification programs include the opportunity to be accountable to someone else. This provides support, encouragement and the likelihood that behavior change will occur.

Therefore, to truly maximize learning, it is important to have the foresight to structure the program in a way that fully supports the learner's application of the concepts. Some ways to do this include:

- **Progress Checks:** It is important that participants know they are expected to report their progress one month after the class is over. This leaves them with the impression that they are expected to immediately put the learning concepts into practice and that their results will be reviewed by others. Some key questions to ask them to report in a short survey can include:
  - What did you learn?
  - What did you do?
  - What happened as a result of what you did?

  When this information is collected 30 days after the class, it provides the training manager and their team with the insight to assess how participants are applying the concepts back on the job.
- **Accountability Buddy:** An "Accountability Buddy" is another participant in the program who can serve as a peer coach. Participants can determine together a schedule for checking in with each other, and share their Leadership Development Plans. This enables each Accountability Buddy to not only receive support, but also provide it.
- **Manager Discussion and Involvement:** One of the key people the learner should be accountable to is their own manager. The Leadership Development Plan described above provides a tool for that discussion. However, during your program you can also encourage each participant to:
  - Send an email to their Manager (and the Training Manager if desired) about the key things they learned and what they will now do differently.
  - Request a time to meet with their Manager to share their Leadership Development Plan in depth.

This can provide a structure that each participant can initiate to encourage their own manager's involvement, support and coaching after the class.

Deadly Mistake No. 6: Not Measuring Improvement

Every training manager needs to be able to report to key stakeholders within the organization that the learning program is making a difference. You need to be able to justify this beyond just the learning evaluation participants provide at the end of class (affectionately referred to by some as the "smile sheets").

Some ways you can help measure progress include:

- **Formal Re-Assessment:** If you provided a formal assessment as part of your leadership program, this provides an excellent pre-assessment tool you can measure against in a post-assessment. Some assessments lend themselves more easily to that than others. An excellent choice is something that measures the individual's strengths and development needs, such as 360 degree feedback.
- **End of Course Assessment Tied to Key Metrics:** Instead of just providing learners a standard evaluation form at the end of your class, make sure to ask them questions tied to key metrics showing success of the program. These should include items linked to how much they learned (compared to other programs), the degree of improved leadership skills they gained, and the percentage improvement they expect on the job as a result of the program.
- **6 Month Assessment:** You can provide the same questionnaire you did at the end of class to ask participants to share how much they estimate their skills have improved. You can also collect data from their own manager and direct reports if desired. While this report provides estimated feedback, it is an easy and quick way to measure progress.
- **12-18 Month Assessment:** In addition to the 6 Month Assessment, you can measure feedback once more at 12-18 month intervals to identify how steadfast the results have been and the progress achieved.
- **Interviews:** In addition to the quantitative feedback collected in the assessment process, the qualitative feedback provided by personal interviews can provide greatly expanded information. These interviews can be conducted by your internal staff or an external, independent source.
- **In-Depth ROI Measurement:** This involves a more extensive process of initially identifying and measuring the key metrics most leaders in your program are responsible for. These should be quantified so that after the program, the learner's improvement can be measured. This allows you to compare the monetary benefits of the program with the costs. While you can conduct this process internally, many organizations will outsource it to external consultants who have the time and expertise to conduct a thorough study.

Deadly Mistake No. 7: Not Making the Learning Experience Engaging and Fun (in other words, making it a Snore)

Last but not least, learning should be Fun!

Let's face it: Who wants to be bored?!? That's the kiss of death inside a classroom. Adults learn by having "ah ha moments" or discovery exercises where they can link the key points from the exercise to their own work experience. Participants will tune out and turn off if they are asked to watch a boring series of slides with no interaction. We don't really learn that way.

So it is imperative that you provide learning programs that are highly interactive and engaging in order to create memorable experiences. Some ways you can do that include:

Summary

You want to hit a home run on your next leadership program. In order to do that, you've got to make sure the program is designed from start to finish to hit the mark for your participants and your organization. By first becoming aware of these 7 Deadly Mistakes, and making sure to craft your programs to avoid them, you can be certain your program will succeed.

Remember, that Learning is not the same as Attending. Real Learning Requires Real Change.

About the Author

Susan Cullen is Director of Learning, JER HR Group, and the Founder of NexaLearning. She is among the top one percent of Wiley Workforce Learning consultants, worldwide, who are recognized as Diamond award-winning partners.

A renowned expert on leadership and management development, she has been a trusted partner for over 25 years to organizations who are seeking to develop the leadership skills their managers and supervisors need. She is co-author of the book, ***101 Great Ways to Advance Your Career***, and numerous eLearning courses for Management and Leadership Development.

In July 2023, NexaLearning merged with JER HR Group, a national consulting firm specializing in HR, compensation consulting, and talent development. In a joint interview, Susan said, "Our unique strength is providing leadership programs that create long-lasting results. Collectively, we will be able to help more companies understand the importance of creating a workforce culture that develops and values people. Our focus is to grow managers who engage employees. When that happens, employees feel appreciated, committed, and want to give their best each day."

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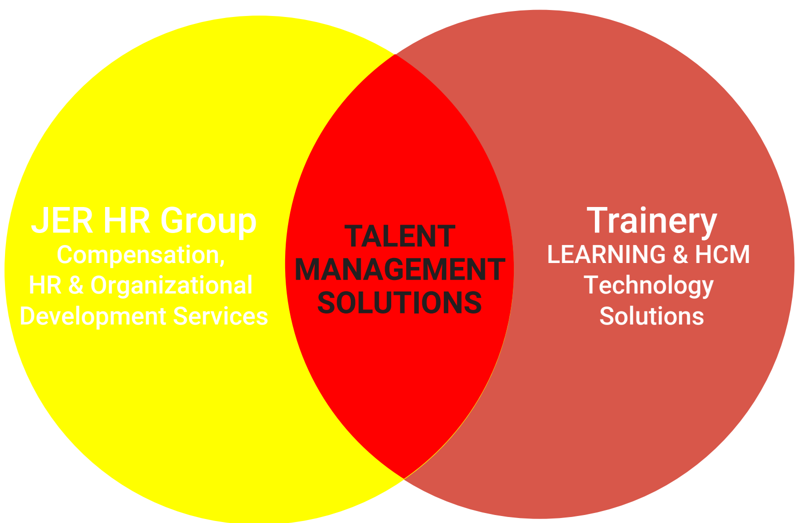

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