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Veterinary Practice Training at the Olympic Level, PART 2
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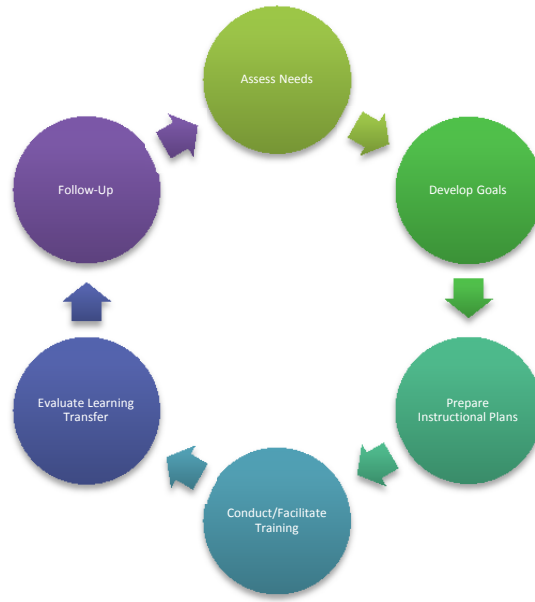
Training Programs: Putting Theory Into Practice

Training programs exist to promote individual and/or organizational change. The purpose of a training program may be to encourage the continuous growth of the individual, to prepare individuals for future work opportunities, to help the organization achieve desired business results or better adapt to change. Some training programs, such as employee orientation or safety training, are mandatory. Training programs come in all shapes, sizes, and formats and vary from extremely formal to informal in nature. Components of training programs may include:

- Courses, such as e-Learning Courses or other distance learning
- Workshops
- Seminars or Retreats
- Activities, such as job-shadowing, peer coaching, or one-on-one instruction
- Conferences
- Individual learning plans and portfolios

In the veterinary practice, these programs may be planned and developed internally or outsourced. Most managers and veterinarians do not have expertise in instructional design or planning programs for the adult learner, so the process of planning training programs can be overwhelming. One approach that helps minimize stress and maximize success of planning learning programs is to use a program planning model.

The following is a simple model for small business program planning:



Developing Learning Objectives

The first step is to assess the needs of the organization, which will determine if there is a true training need. The information gained in completing a needs assessment will provide the necessary insight for determining the learning objectives. In order to establish learning objectives, first we must determine two main goals for the training program.

- What will the learners learn?
- Why is it important to them?

The answers to these two statements will guide the process. The goals will identify if the training will be attitude-changing or skill-building. Learning objectives identify what the learners will do to learn and to demonstrate their knowledge during the training session. Keep in mind that learning objectives need to be specific, measurable and observable. There should be ample learning objectives to accomplish each goal in the training session.

Here is a simplified way to approach learning objectives: **A – B – C – D**

Audience: Who will be trained? Consider team member background and experience.

Behavior: What will they be doing? (skill-building or attitude-changing)

Condition: How will they do it? By when?

Degree: How well will they do it? What is an acceptable range of performance?

Objectives serve an important purpose in providing clarity to participants and also serve as a basis for evaluation of the success of training programs. In veterinary practices, creating a system of training programs that are connected to specific steps in the career path of each team member is an important consideration.

Preparing Instructional Plans

Once learning objectives have been aligned to accomplish the goals of the training program, those learning objectives need to be matched with appropriate learning methods. Depending on whether the objective is knowledge-based, skill-building or attitudinal, different methods apply to support learning.

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Knowledge | Reading Lectures Diagrams Audio Self-paced exercises Small group discussions Games |
| Skills | Case Studies Demonstrations Role-Playing Videos Exercises & Practice (Repetition) |
| Attitude | Plays or Debates Games Self-Analysis |

The creation of a hierarchy or map will aid in the logical organization of the training material. Clustering and sequencing learning objectives to identify similar content chunks and interdependencies will inform the development of units, sections or training modules.

Blended Learning Approaches

Many training programs in veterinary hospitals utilize a blended learning approach. A blended approach to learning is one where multiple training modalities are used in order to meet specific learning objectives. The multiple method approach is not an accidental potpourri, but it is instead purposefully designed to create a more practical and useful experience for the learner. Advantages of blended learning include reduced training costs, increased efficiency and

increased instructional value. Examples of methods that are used in blended learning include the following:

- Mentoring
- e-learning or self-paced electronic learning system
- Virtual classroom or webinar
- Self-study (printed or electronic/PDF)
- Recorded audio +/- video sessions
- Demonstrations/Role-playing exercises, Field Trips
- Performance support such as job aids, infographics, tools
- On-The-Job training
- Games
- Web-based collaboration or discussion boards

For example, a blended learning approach to a phone skills communication training program may start with pre-reading and e-learning, continue with role-playing demonstrations guided by a phone script (job aid), and conclude with one-on-one instruction from a mentor to continue the coaching process. Because the receptionist needs a combination of a knowledge-base as well as skills, these learning methods are appropriately matched with the best training methods for maximum learning transfer.

Learning Transfer

Learning transfer begins with the team member's application of the training while back on-the-job. First, the team member must have achieved a certain level of proficiency to apply the knowledge and skills. Second, the team member must have an opportunity to use the knowledge and skills. Opportunity and proficiency help answer the question, "Can I?" The next question that must be answered is "Will I?" which gets at a team member's motivation. (Pollack et. al, 2012) There are six key motivators for adults in learning.

- Social relationships: Making new friends, connections, and associations
- External expectations: To fulfill the expectations of someone in authority
- Social welfare: To prepare for service to the community and sense of contribution
- Personal advancement: To achieve higher job status, advancement
- Escape/Stimulation: To relieve boredom and repetition, increase enrichment
- Cognitive interest: To learn for the sake of learning (Abdullah et. al, 2008)

Incorporating these motivators directly and indirectly into the team member's learning and development increases the likelihood of learning transfer. Only if both "Can I?" and "Will I?" are

answered in the affirmative, does an episodic training experience have the potential to convert to improved performance.

Evaluating Learning Transfer

Evaluating learning transfer guides powerful decisions such as improving or changing the design or delivery of training, determining whether learning objectives have been achieved, justifying the resources dedicated to the training program and anticipating future training needs. Evaluating the effectiveness of learning programs can be done quantitatively and qualitatively, using formal and informal methods.

There are five levels of evaluation of learning, according to the Kirkpatrick and Phillips models. The first level of evaluation focuses simply on the immediate reactions of the team members participating in training. At the second level, the amount of skill and knowledge acquired is gauged. The third level is actually where behavioral change is assessed; this involves measuring the degree to which the team members are applying learning to their jobs. The fourth level of evaluation involves the measurement of business impact or organizational change. Only at the highest level is return on investment determined (Phillips, Phillips, and Ray 2015.)

According to a 2015 survey by the Association for Talent Development, nine out of ten businesses surveyed report evaluating learning at Level 1. However, only 35% reportedly measure business impact or Level 4. As for evaluating return on investment, only 15% were reported to measure at Level 5 (Phillips, Phillips, and Ray 2015.)

Regardless of the level of evaluation possible for the business model, evaluation efforts should provide insights that inspire action and continual improvement of training programs and the success of the organization.

Developing an organized training plan with goals and objectives related to business goals provides the foundation for performance accountability and individual growth within the business. Since objectives are measurable and training efforts are being evaluated, the opportunity exists to continue to improve performance through coaching and other performance improvement techniques.

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