



# Toward a Cartography of *Learning*

BY LAURA A. DAVIS, MCC

As coaches, our objective is to collaborate with our clients to help them get from where they are now to where they'd like to be. It follows, then, that whether we're engaged in one-on-one or group coaching conversations or we are in a training situation, we need to understand a client's current situation as well as what they'd like to achieve.

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While that sounds obvious, creating an impactful training program that yields sustainable results can be challenging without a clear road map. Why is it so challenging to show concrete results from soft-skills training? Maybe it's because, often, no real training actually occurs.

From my experience, I see three primary reasons why this is so. First, it is rare that an appropriate needs assessment is conducted prior to developing a training program. It is common for an organizational leader to say, "We need training on x," and for either the internal training department or an external provider to then offer training in that subject without first fully investigating the organization's true needs. Second, a comprehensive model for developing an effective training program is rarely implemented. I will outline an overview of what that involves in this article. Finally, training programs tend to fail when they're based on the misguided notion that knowledge and knowledge alone is power. The truth is, trainers can't just deliver information—they must also provide structured opportunities for action-based practice and learning.

## Determining the Destination

As Henry Ford said, "Before everything else, getting ready is the secret of success." For trainers, this means doing some detective work to determine the client's real training needs. Clients don't always know what they need. Frequently, they know what they don't want and they look to the trainer to fix it. However, training programs that are based on what the client doesn't want usually yield only quick, superficial fixes—not lasting, sustainable change.

In "Identifying Targeted Training Needs: A Practical Guide to Beginning an Effective Training Strategy," my friend and colleague, Sally Sparhawk, outlines the Needs Analysis Model (shown at right), which sets forth six actions you can take toward a comprehensive needs analysis. Each action is driven by a focus question crafted with a desired outcome in mind.

## NEEDS ANALYSIS MODEL\*

Action Needed	Question to Ask	Outcome/deliverable Produced
<b>Assess your current situation</b>	Where are we now?	A clear definition of the situation.
<b>Envision your future</b>	Where do we want to be?	A clear description of what the desired future state looks and feels like.
<b>Gather information</b>	What do we need to know?	A systematic gathering of relevant ideas and information from the appropriate people to establish a comprehensive picture.**
<b>Sort your information</b>	What does the information tell us?	Themes and challenges that need to be addressed.
<b>Share the results</b>	How do we use this information to move forward?	A summary of issues and recommendations.
<b>Decide your next step</b>	What actions should we take to have a positive impact?	An action plan for mapping the training approach.

\* Developed by Sally Sparhawk

\*\*This can be achieved with a combination of assessments including qualitative and quantitative interviews, 360-degree instruments, etc.

As with all successful coaching, the key to establishing an effective training strategy based upon the results of your needs analysis is to establish effective partnerships with others. Each person you involve in your needs analysis can become a partner in mapping a solution to the real concerns at hand. This is also the key to buy-in, which is critical to sustainable success. Be sure to keep all of your stakeholders informed throughout the process so they can become the support group for implementing the solution.

## Drawing the Map

Perhaps the most important reason many training programs don't succeed is that they fail to follow a comprehensive road map for success. There are many helpful resources and models for developing effective training programs, including those available through the American Society for Training and Development.

For our purposes, I am outlining Richard Chang's High-Impact Training Model (shown below). I like it because it is a practical approach to training and it continues where most models leave off—the evaluation stage. It is important to assess how well participants have translated their learning into on-the-job action. (The last booklet in Richard's "High-Impact Training" series, "Measuring the Impact of Training," by Pamela Wade, is a valuable resource for coaches who want to learn more about assessing training programs.)

### HIGH-IMPACT TRAINING MODEL\*

Phase	Task(s)
Identify training needs	Determine if and how training can play a role. Target training (not educational) outcomes.
Map the approach	Choose appropriate training approach to support the desired outcomes.
Produce learning tools	Produce all training/coaching components.
Apply training techniques	Deliver training as designed in accordance with principles of adult learning.
Calculate	Assess whether training accomplished actual performance improvement; communicate results; redesign process as necessary.
Track ongoing follow-through	Identify techniques that individuals and organization can use to ensure training outcomes are sustainable over time.

\* Developed by Richard Chang

"Proficiency is only gained through practice under real-world conditions. ... The same principle applies to training."

## Taking the Journey

Do you remember when you learned how to ride a bicycle? Did you sit indoors reading how-to books, watching videos and analyzing case studies of biking accidents? Or did you grab your helmet, head outside, and ride the bike with a parent or other coach giving you pointers and cheering you on? I think that most of us can see the folly of the former approach. Even so, a surprising number of training programs follow those exact steps, filling participants' minds with knowledge without giving them an opportunity to actively apply what they've learned.

As another example, consider your own professional development. En route to becoming a professional coach, you most likely completed a multifaceted educational process that included coursework, webinars, lots of reading and participation in a Mentor Coaching relationship. Although all of these experiences helped you acquire and deepen subject-specific knowledge, taken alone, they wouldn't have resulted in coaching competency and proficiency. Proficiency is only gained through practice under real-world conditions.

The same principle applies to training. Awareness and education are essential precursors to trainees' success, but real learning only happens when they're given a structured opportunity to change their behavior, receive feedback and continue practicing until they acquire confidence and the "feel" of the new skill.

Phew! As you can see, training isn't a simple task. It involves more than just creating a single event or a compelling classroom experience. Nor is it enough to just have a great dynamic trainer or compelling program materials. And of course, training doesn't end once you've evaluated a program.

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Instead, great training can be developed by following a comprehensive road map or model that gets at the root of the issue(s) identified by a comprehensive needs analysis. The good news for coaches? The most effective way to develop interpersonal business skills is to have people practice with the appropriate balance of challenge and support from a trained coach. Have people practice and persist in repeating skills until they can perform with more ease and fluency. That’s where the confidence and competence to succeed really lies. Including these essential elements in your training programs will ensure real learning and increased performance for years to come.



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