



# Book The Six Disciplines of Breakthrough Learning

## How to Turn Training and Development into Business Results

Calhoun Wick, Roy Pollock, Andrew Jefferson and Richard Flanagan  
Pfeiffer, 2006

### Recommendation

Even if learning professionals design superb programs with outstanding content and instructors deliver the material in engaging, compelling ways, these programs unfortunately may not be relevant to actual daily operations. They may lack solid business – as opposed to learning – objectives. Such initiatives may not accomplish what managers intend and will not make your business grow. Calhoun Wick, Roy Pollock, Andrew Jefferson and Richard Flanagan explain how learning officers and training departments can use their “six disciplines” or “6D” approach to increase the effectiveness and impact of training and development programs. They’ve written a good book – a tad dry but very thorough – that outlines a top-quality program. The authors repeat, a bit too frequently, that training’s real payoff occurs in its practical application. *BooksInShort* believes this book will help those who provide, purchase or benefit from corporate training and development.

### Take-Aways

- The application of new knowledge fuels breakthrough corporate change.
- Successful training and development programs require strong discipline, firm purpose, systematic management and superior execution.
- Learning and development programs must meet clearly defined business objectives.
- The success of these programs depends not just on the information they convey but also on the results they produce.
- Training programs need strong support, especially from the managers of participating employees.
- Their content must directly relate to issues that staff members deal with daily.
- Managers need to measure the effectiveness of training programs.
- To accomplish anything worthwhile, such programs demand active follow-through.
- To be competitive, companies need outstanding employees who learn quickly and who possess extensive know-how.
- Investment in training and development is as vital as investment in products, research and sales.

### Summary

#### “Six Disciplines” for Effective Training and Development

Corporate training and development programs should enforce six vital disciplines:

#### Discipline One: “Define Outcomes in Business Terms”

Your training and development programs may bring in lots of people, dispense valuable information and earn a good reputation, but they are of little use if they do not deliver results that improve your company’s “business outcomes.” When you plan education and development programming, work backward from the business results you seek to the training your staff members need to achieve those targets. Map the impact of instruction and development by asking: “What business needs will training meet?” “What skills will the participants attain?” “Who will determine performance improvement?” And, “How will the company measure and document results?”

“It is much more difficult to cut the budget of a learning and development organization that has credible, documented evidence of business impact than one that has only measures of training activity.”

Training and development programs should have positive financial rewards; that is, they should produce a measurable reduction in costs or an increase in sales and profits. Developing verifiable financial return-on-investment (ROI) metrics for every training and development initiative isn't possible. Instead, establish "verifiable outcomes of relevance to the business of the organization" for every program. Avoid these common mistakes:

- "Action without analysis" – This often results in training without business payoffs.
- "Confusion between means and ends" – The number of courses and of students taught is far less important than reaching the goal of making the business better.
- "Laudable intent" – The training objective – for example, total quality – may be meritorious. However, the program should focus on deliverables.
- "No line leader input" – To meet bona fide business objectives, training requires managerial commitment.
- "Training results cannot be measured" – Were this true – and it is not – then the reverse would also be true: that no business can measure the negative consequences of reducing training. Is this an argument you want to make?

"Learning is not an event, it is a process."

Research the best training targets. Get the input you need internally, such as plans from individual business units. Speak to managers and to the employees in the trenches. Since you can't train for everything, focus on targets with maximum payoffs. Ensure that training has a positive impact on the particular problem you are trying to solve. Determine the specific business objectives a program should achieve and develop agreements with line leaders on how to measure success.

## Discipline Two: "Design the Complete Experience"

The "learning experience" covers more than classroom activity. "Learning transfer," the practical application of knowledge, is what really counts. To this end, corporate learning has three phases:

1. Pre-instruction – Managers play a central role in establishing all-important expectations. Participants with low expectations will derive little from training. Those with high expectations will benefit more. Get management on board early, because the way managers regard the training program will greatly influence how employees perceive it. Make sure participants view upcoming training as a privilege. Prepare them properly with pre-course readings or other learning activities.
2. Training – Actual teaching requires thorough planning by course designers. Use an "if-then" approach, with clear financial goals, to develop course content. Start with a business objective and work backward. For example, if sales need to increase, then sales managers must become better coaches. So they must see how professional coaches operate and receive helpful guidance as they practice the techniques they observe.
3. Knowledge "transfer and application" – This stage is the *raison d'être* of training. Transferring learning requires active reinforcement. Those who supervise training must encourage managers to lead employees to apply their new skills and to use predetermined metrics to judge the training's effectiveness. To test a training program, the content developer should ask on behalf of the learners, "Is it clear how this material relates to my work?" and "Would I know how to actually use what is being taught?"

## Discipline Three: "Deliver for Application"

How can corporate trainers close the "learning-doing gap"? How can they move participants from "knowledge acquisition" to "knowledge application"? To meet this goal, they must present training that includes: "relevant examples, active learning, simulations, practice sessions and other application-focused delivery techniques." A trainer's primary goal should be to ensure that participants apply their new skills eagerly. Without such motivation, training is a waste of time. Participants will be indifferent to training they perceive as irrelevant, so trainers must explicitly connect training and work. Particularly, focus on links between training and business outcomes.

"The only competitive advantage the company of the future will have is its managers' ability to learn faster than their competitors."

You can employ simulations to make training more applicable, but avoid oversimplifying. After simulations, use intelligent debriefing to demonstrate a new technique's applicability. Participants need time during training to consider how newly learned methods will help them in their jobs. Therefore, include components that enable trainees to reflect on the learning experience. Have them write "learning journals" to record their "learning transfer and application" goals as well as their ideas about how training will increase their productivity.

"Ultimately, every training initiative must produce a positive financial return, directly or indirectly."

Trainers and participants must treat goals for transferring learning as seriously as managers treat business targets. Participants should define their training objectives in writing, share those objectives with their managers and track their progress accordingly. As training reinforcement, employees should create and practice "elevator" speeches that describe their training experiences to their managers and colleagues.

## Discipline Four: "Drive Follow-Through"

Adequate follow-through is necessary to ensure that training programs reliably achieve their business objectives. Use "follow-through management" to encourage employees to apply their new knowledge. Various vendors now sell commercial follow-through management systems that involve these crucial steps:

- "Setting the right expectations" – Trainers should outline what the company expects of participants and their managers after formal instruction. If you do not stress that follow-through is vital, no one will execute it.
- "Gathering and analyzing data" – Businesses require information to determine if they are moving ahead or falling behind. The need for reliable data is equally crucial for training departments. Without it, their managers cannot properly evaluate staffers' goals, their post-training activities or their success in becoming more productive.
- "Providing reminders and mileposts" – These messages can take numerous forms, from email to phone calls. Such reminders keep participants focused on the lessons they've learned.
- "Ensuring accountability" – Tell employees they are responsible for applying the knowledge they gain during training. Have them demonstrate that

accomplishment.

- “Providing feedback” – Direct reports, managers, peers and colleagues all can offer helpful reactions.
- “Delivering consequences” – Praise outstanding learners or provide appropriate rebukes. Hold employees accountable for their participation.

## Discipline Five: “Deploy Active Support”

Funding expensive training programs and then not assisting in the application of their results makes no sense. Support should emanate from the top. Managers play a primary role in providing the encouragement participants need to transfer what they’ve learned to their work. Unhelpful managers might downplay the usefulness of training or publicly belittle its effectiveness. Trainers who fail to secure supervisors’ initial input about the relevance of their programs’ content may face this kind of negative reaction. Employees cannot apply their training usefully in such an environment.

“The greatest course in the world will fail to produce results if the environment to which the learner returns is barren or hostile.”

Instead of this counterproductive attitude, managers should enthusiastically advocate training. Their attitude should be that it teaches people “the way we do business here.” Ensure that your firm’s managers fully understand the value of training. Market it to them specifically, covering “what’s in it for me?” Managers must coach employees after formal training, so fully verse them in the program’s substance and goals. Managers must also understand what the company expects of participants after training.

“No company can leave follow-through on business objectives to chance and still be successful.”

Instructors, colleagues and coaches who want to provide instruction after formal training should act as “facilitators of behavioral change.” Follow-up after training is similar to customer support after a major purchase (the “‘whole product’ experience”). Develop and distribute online “owner’s manuals for corporate education” that training participants can use as “context-sensitive” references and guideposts for measuring their progress.

## Discipline Six: “Document Results”

Did the training achieve its objectives? The answer will help determine whether the company should sponsor additional learning initiatives. Senior executives will expect training managers to document the dividends from training by providing “sound, thorough, credible and auditable evidence” of their program’s bottom-line business value. Base such information on your initial objectives. When attempting to justify your training programs, avoid these common traps:

- “Measuring activity rather than outcomes” – Measuring the number of courses, the hours of training you conducted or how many students you taught is easy. But these metrics convey nothing about the program’s effectiveness. Instead, find ways to measure whether training made the participants more productive and improved the business.
- “Confusing positive reaction with positive results” – According to a recent study, “end-of-course evaluations” do not indicate whether the training program created value in terms of its business objectives. Such assessments mainly indicate student satisfaction.
- “Adopting a learning versus business perspective” – Training is not primarily about learning. It is about business impact.

“Organizations should spend 10 times more energy reinforcing the training they have just conducted instead of looking for the next great learning initiative.”  
(author Ken Blanchard)

When possible, use available business data for your metrics (“sales, expenses, number of complaints, quality index,” and so on) and quantify your results. With leadership training, take a survey of participants’ supervisors and peers to determine if the subjects become better leaders after formal instruction. Securing hard, quantifiable data about the impact of training may not always be possible. In such cases, see if participants can identify the improvements they experienced after training, how much of their improvement they can attribute to training and what value those changes might have, if they can determine a dollar amount.

“The real work begins when the course ends.”

Do not turn the results of this analysis into a boring report that no one will read. Instead, actively market your outcomes to senior management. Treat these executives as customers you must convince to continue to buy your product, which is additional training. Tell your story creatively. Never attempt to fudge negative results. Eventually, you will get caught, and you and your training department will forfeit your credibility.

## Universal Applications of the Six-Disciplines Approach

While ideal for training and development, this six-disciplines or “6D” approach can benefit a diverse range of business programs and initiatives. These include strategic plan execution and business development plan completion. Follow-through management provides the ideal method for attaining a solid ROI in numerous business applications and processes.

## About the Authors

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