

Stop Your Whining, Start Your Shining

BY KEN BOHN, SR. EDITOR

We hear it all the time:

“My manager won’t approve additional training until I prove that the training we want will have a positive return on investment!”

“How can I prove to the skeptics that training really can change behavior?”

“Why do so many of the people I send to training come back without applying anything they were supposed to learn?”

To those people, we say (in no uncertain terms), “Stop your whining and start your shining!”

Everybody knows the definition of whining. But what is shining? And we do not mean the kind of shining from the Jack Nicholson movie.

The shining we refer to is the opportunity that we all have to show we have embraced the training we received and can readily apply it to our jobs. The act of gaining knowledge in and of itself isn’t shining. Anyone can increase the amount of knowledge they possess. But what good is increased knowledge without a change in behavior?

Simply put, not applying the knowledge one has gained to improve one’s performance is a waste of time.

Shining is the chance to put knowledge into practical use. Professionals use their newly-acquired knowledge immediately after training so that the jewels of training do not slip away.

What is the best way to assure a good shine? Use ongoing role-plays to monitor and foster the skills you learned from the training.

See...you’re doing it right now. Quit your whining!

We all know that people hate being monitored, almost as much as they hate role-plays. We may initially see some whining in our training classes when we introduce role-plays. Yet, when it’s all said and done, people usually point to the role-play they performed in class as the most tangible and beneficial part of training.

Role-play provides concrete structure to help professionals shine when they get back to their office.

How do you put yourself or your employees in the best position to shine once the training class has been

completed? Try a little program we call *Listen and Play*. The “listen” deals with

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monitoring, and the “play” relates directly to role-play. We have found that the companies who get the most out of training are the same ones that have a process to follow up with employees after the training class is over. This ensures that the employees are putting the new skills to use.

People like to look good so much that they avoid situations that will make them look bad. So give returning students the chance to shine by putting those skills on display right away. This will reinforce the newly learned skills

before those skills have a chance to fade or be forgotten.

Listen/Monitor

We strongly suggest that the supervisor or manager monitor the newly acquired skills of their people who have just been through a training class within two weeks after completion. This will help managers judge how much the student really absorbed during training. It also gives the supervisor a chance to fine-tune the skills that apply to their specific office situation and provide feedback.

Then we recommend monitoring again, a few months later, to determine if those skills actually sunk in. This gives the supervisor another opportunity to fine tune the skills.

Role-Play

The second half of the “shine” process encourages supervisors and managers to repeat role-plays with their staff in order to get firsthand knowledge of how the employee applies the skills received through the training. Almost as important, role-plays give the employee a venue to shine.

Some companies go even further. They give the employee a chance to shine by being in a role-play without the employee even knowing it.

A great example of this is the program that Paragon Subrogation Services utilizes. Paragon will immediately tell you how the training and knowledge base of their employees is at the forefront of their success and integral to their growth.

They discovered early on that ongoing staff training and development are

not only the keys to their success, but also paramount to their distinct competitive advantage.

It is interesting to note that of the training methods employed by Paragon, one of the most effective has proven to be unannounced role-plays. They often have a manager make an unannounced and unexpected call to one of their employees to see how they are handling a situation in a “real world” environment. The trainee does not know it is a manager conducting a role-play until it is over, at which time the manager gives the employee feedback and follow-up training.

“What is amazing is how little monitoring and role-playing we actually have to do,” said Ani Naccachian, the owner and president of Paragon. “Just knowing that a caller *might* be a manager, seems to greatly increase people’s willingness to stick with a newly learned

skill. Plus, managers who make the calls get the added benefit of firsthand knowledge of whether the training sunk in.”

Client Services Manager Olivia Martinez added, “We have heard from more than just a few employees that it helps keep them on their toes to know that anyone they are talking to could be a manager — and the immediate feedback is invaluable. It is also not uncommon for our collectors to receive thank-you notes from the debtors that they have just collected from, saying that it was a pleasure to work with them given their degree of professionalism. All of this started soon after the unannounced role-play program began.”

Whining Part II: But we have neither the time nor money for training or role-plays!

It is very easy for the companies that closely watch their bottom line to consider cutting back on training budgets in an ill-fated attempt to save money. Training should never be viewed as an optional expense that is only a luxury in times of prosperity.

Insightful is the company that

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looks beyond the initial expense to seize a true competitive advantage. They recognize that success inevitably lies within the strength of well trained and knowledgeable employees. And they realize that shining does not end when class is dismissed. They give both their employees and company a chance to shine when it counts the most — when they are dealing with the customer.

Yes, training is an investment in employees; but this investment will pay exponential dividends over the length of the employees' tenure. This

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training can also exponentially benefit the employer. Each person trained can provide a collateral benefit by increasing the effectiveness of employees that work for them, with them, and around them. Unless the trained employee works in a remote location, it would be almost impossible for this newfound knowledge not to be shared with others. Shining is contagious!

There are also numerous examples of how a single skill learned by a single employee in a single class has paid repeated dividends for both the employee and the employer. Consider a skill learned in a negotiations class that paid for itself through a single negotiation. Or how about a single customer that was extremely satisfied with their claims experience and, in turn, not only became an “Extremely Satisfied” customer, but also referred their friends and family to that company. The economic benefit of retention and referral business cannot easily be measured. But there is no question that this underlying benefit

lives and breathes in the most successful companies.

If this benefit could be tracked on a balance sheet, the profits would start showing up on corporate annual reports and be a topic of discussion in shareholders' meetings. Until then, companies must rely on managers to make the decision to train staff members and take a critical role in the prosperity of both the employees' and the company's success.

The great news is that virtually all of these same managers have benefited themselves from training, and probably even from role-playing. This is the same training that may have even played a key role in allowing them to shine, and subsequently reach their current management position.

These managers have found that training is readily available and can come in many different formats. While the training type may depend on the topic and level of skill looking to be developed, the following are some typical training options:

- Training Seminars and Classes
- Educational Conferences
- Specialized Certifications (CPCU, AIC, SCLE, NASP, CSRP, etc.)
- Claims Association Meetings
- College Classes and/or Degrees
- And yes...Role-Plays.

Like Paragon, many companies have also found that training resources are available in many formats; and by keeping open to whatever program or technique best matches the given opportunity area, they are able to constantly raise the bar for the level of training and skills needed by their employees.

Training should not stop there

As part of the training process, we recommend fostering a continuous learning environment that will fully leverage the following six steps:

- ① Assess needs and opportunities of the employees.
- ② Assess current proficiency and benchmark of a given skill-set.

- ③ Establish a goal as to where they would like to be once training is complete.
- ④ Identify and implement the best available training for this skill-set.
- ⑤ Establish a training follow-up and reinforcement method (i.e. Role-Plays).
- ⑥ Measure the skill improvement and effectiveness in relation to the goal.

Given the vast mountains of data that are commonly available to most managers, finding opportunity areas and setting benchmarks should be relatively easy. And with the many training options that are now available, including customized training that can even be delivered directly to your door, there is rarely an issue of finding the right training program to fit your needs. Companies often map out steps one through four and provide some of the best training programs available to their employees.

Another great benefit of the role-play is that it incorporates steps five and six of this six-step learning process. Specifically, role-plays not only establish a training follow-up method to reinforce the training, they also allow the manager and the employee to measure the skill effectiveness in relation to a specific goal. This fact is important since these last two steps are where many companies typically fall short.

Without a clear follow-up plan to reinforce the training, and without a clear plan to measure its success, the employee isn't getting the benefit that the training was intended to provide. Training shows employees what they are capable of accomplishing and provides a vision into the rewards that are attainable if they practice what they have learned.

As you practice, so shall you do!

So why stop with just knowing you now have the skills to shine? Set your company even further apart from the competition by recognizing and investing in all the benefits that training will provide. And don't forget to use role-plays to shine your way to success!