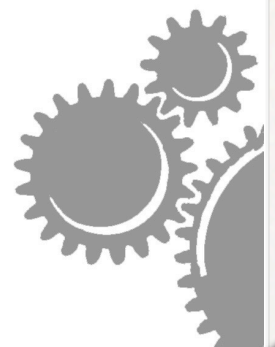


IMPROVING YOUR TRAINING FROM WITHIN

THE POST TRAINING HOT WASH



Introduction

Evaluating training is an important process of determining whether you are obtaining your objectives in the most effective manner. The purpose of evaluation is not only to assess how successful your training program is, but also identify ways in which you can improve it to attain greater success in your endeavours.

All training should be evaluated and if it isn't being done formally, rest assured that it is being done informally by the participants, other team members and the casual observers (such as customers, suppliers, other departments). Informal evaluation can easily be detrimental to the workplace and cause discourse, resentment and disrespect between team members and supervisors.

Formal evaluation will help eradicate destructive criticism by actively pursuing improvement and inviting those with an opinion to share their knowledge and experience. There are many ways that you can evaluate training programs and the tools include questionnaires, post training assessments and customer satisfaction surveys. Unfortunately, most of these tools identify where the problems lie, but don't necessarily describe the best process to rectify them.

Typically, the next step is for an organisations to bring in experts to assess learning programs and implement strategy for improvement. This usually occurs because training is only a subset of their core business and it is more cost effective to hire the 'experience' than it is to develop it within their ranks. Ironically, these specialists aren't always that familiar with your particular training needs or restraints and will need to call on local expertise and familiarity to identify effective, workable solutions.

Don't get me wrong. These specialists are certainly masters in their field and know the correct questions to ask. Not only that, they know how to interrogate the organisations employees to get to the root of the problem and develop solutions that will be implemented with results.

What often surprises managers is how much their employees know, how insightful they can be when it comes to understanding the problems of the workplace and how innovative they can be when it comes to finding solution.

Unsurprisingly, there are plenty of tools available to assist the manager in obtaining this same insight from their own staff without needing the intervention or support of an often expensive, third party facilitator.

My favourite tool is the post training hot wash. Now it isn't necessarily the best tool for an extensive evaluation of training and will not solve all your problems, especially if the program is in dire need of improvement. It is best suited for established training programs that are currently working, but could do with some minor improvements or development to increase their effectiveness.

The post training hot wash

The post-training hot wash or wash up is a meeting, after all training has been completed, to review the process and identify opportunities for improvement.

In this context, we are describing the post training meeting that gathers all the participants to evaluate the entire training process. It is not entirely negative and is similar to the debrief that a trainer would complete after a training session, but focuses more on opportunities to improve the training process by using brainstorming techniques.

The **Hot Wash** is a military term that describes a quick review after an operation or training exercise to determine the level of success.

It is also used to establish lessons that can be implemented to improve the outcome for future similar activities.

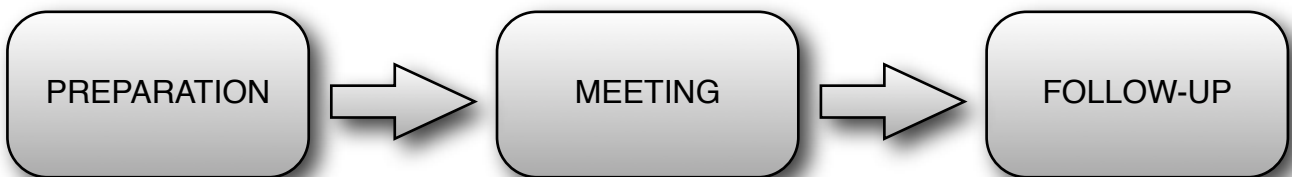
It also known as a **debrief** or **after action review**.

The goals are to establish which aspects worked well and should therefor be repeated or included in future training efforts, as well as identify those areas that need improvement or be adjusted.

The hot wash

The hot wash brings the participants together to discuss the training and its conduct. The format is rigid, but the delivery is flexible, so that you can foster an open atmosphere for criticism and suggestions. It is akin to brain storming where the focus is on generating ideas and leaving the details to be worked out later.

The hot wash itself may only be a single 45-60 minute session, but it needs to be set up and followed up afterward.



Phase one: Preparation

The hot wash will require some preparation before running the meeting, but this action will pay off afterward. If you treat this as an actual meeting and prepare accordingly (agenda, schedule in advance, notify participants, assign roles, as for input etc.), you will achieve better results through more suggestions being offered that have been thought through beforehand.

During the preparation phase you will also need to break the training into components to focus the participants on particular aspects of the training. The meeting area will also need setting up to avoid wasting everybody's time on the day.

However, the most important thing that must be completed before the meeting begins is the training itself. There is very little value in trying to assess aspects of the training that have still yet to be completed.

KEY STEPS

- IDENTIFY KEY AREAS FOR ASSESSMENT
- PREPARE AGENDA AND SCHEDULE MEETING
- SET-UP MEETING LOCATION
- COMPLETE ALL TRAINING BEFORE BEGINNING MEETING

Identify the key areas

Break up the training into main or key areas. This is to ensure that all of these are covered in the discussion and helps to focus the group during the debriefing session. This usually covers the main components of the training such as:

- Pre training administration
- Theory training
- On the job training
- Final assessment
- Post training administration.

Each of these key area topics may be broken down further. The need for this sort of detail will vary on the length of the program, the type of training and how often this process has been run.

Complete the training.

This should go without saying, but all training, including any administration, must be completed **before** the hot wash meeting begins. You cannot evaluate any component that is still outstanding and if any areas are still incomplete, you have just lost your opportunity to improve on these areas (apart from completing them on time next time around).

Prepare and schedule

Treat this as a meeting and prepare accordingly. This means that you create an agenda and distribute it to all participants with enough lead for them to prepare for the meeting. You will also need to pick the best time and place to run the meeting. The facilities will need to seat the participants, contain a whiteboard or large note pad and plenty of room for the facilitator to move around. During the preparation phase:

- Review student and trainer comments
- Prepare an agenda
- Identify participants
- Consider a facilitator
- Schedule the meeting.

Review student and trainer comments: Start with the student comments to determine if any additional agenda topics are needed. Any concerns that the student may have will likely recur with future training. Additionally, review the trainer's recommendations as it likely that they would have identified (and possibly remedied) any shortcomings in the process. If so, this is information that we will want to share.

Prepare an agenda: Prepare a list of talking points for the hot wash. Typically, this is just the topics that were identified as the 'key areas', but may include additional concerns or thoughts from the student and the trainer. You will also need ten minutes to introduce the meeting, explain its purpose and run through the agenda, as well as another ten minutes to close the meeting.

Identify participants: Identify those involved in the training. Anyone who took part in the training, including its planning or administration, should participate in the hot wash. This also includes the student.

Consider a facilitator: The person running the meeting will need to be energetic and insightful. They must be able to keep the group enthusiastic and delve into their response to elicit valuable

information. If not a facilitator, then an additional person as a scribe may help. It can be quite difficult to do both if the information is fast flowing or the group needs motivating.

Schedule: Schedule a time and location for the hot wash and notify all participants well in advance. Distribute the agenda early so that they can prepare for the meeting. Also, the more notice you give the attendees, the more likely it is that they will be available.

Schedule the hot wash immediately after the training so that it is fresh in everyone's mind. My rule of thumb was within three days. After three days, it took considerably more motivation and effort to run the meeting and the suggestions were less forthcoming.

A hot wash meeting will typically run for 45-60 minutes.

Set up

Set up the room before conducting the hot wash, even if the means coming in earlier than you prefer. You will need suitable seating, a whiteboard or somewhere you can take notes. These notes need to be visible to everyone in the room. A large notepad and easel will suffice, as would an old overhead projector and a piece of blank transparency, but don't rely heavily on technology.

You will also need different coloured markers or pens to highlight specific topics.

Phase two: Meeting

The second phase of the process is the actual meeting itself. The facilitator introduces the meeting, runs through the agenda and with the help of the participants, concludes with an action plan.

KEY STEPS

- INTRODUCTION
- RUN THROUGH THE AGENDA
- CLOSE THE SESSION

Introduction

Like all meetings, begin with thanking your participants attendance and then introduce them to the rest of the gathered team. In particular, identifying the student, the facilitator and the trainer (depending on the size of the organisation of course). These are your key players in the meeting.

The next step is to describe the intent, format and objectives. The sooner the participants realise the importance of this meeting and how they can contribute, the faster you will get meaningful information and suggestions from them.

The crucial components are energy and enthusiasm. Your facilitator must be able to motivate and direct the meeting. Read out the agenda and explain that each participant will be asked to answer the following questions for each agenda item:

- What did you **learn** or discover?
- What would you like to see **improved**?
- What **action** would you take?
- What should we be **repeating** or reinforcing?

This is known as the LIAR approach, based on the acronym for learn, improve, action and repeat.

There are also a few additional ground rules that will need to be shared with the group.

Everything is relevant: If it is said – it goes on the board for later consideration. At this stage we are looking for suggestions, not answers - these will come later.

Nobody is at fault: The focus is on improvement, not blame. This is not personal and it is certainly not a slugging session. Our purpose is to fix the process by identifying where we can make the training more effective.

Everybody participates: Everybody is capable of a good idea and is a valued member of the team. If they were trusted enough to contribute to the training, they are certainly important enough to have their opinions heard.

Finally, split your note board into four columns, heading them with the four words that make up the LIAR acronym.

Run through the agenda.

Roll straight on to the agenda to instil a sense of urgency in the proceedings. Grab the first topic, select the first person and hit them up with the four LIAR questions, noting their comments under the appropriate column.

What did they learn? What was something that they discovered about the learning process or associated administration that may not be common knowledge? Did they find a new resource or introduce a previously untried technique? Of course, this could be one of those “hey don’t ever try this at home” type of lessons that they want to share with the group.

What would they improve? What needs fixing or improving to increase training effectiveness? Focus on the biggest result to them and don’t worry about the cost.

What action would you take? This can be related to the previous point or it may be something else that they think needs to be done to improve the training. This could also be something that they would only do if they were in charge or a minor change they would like to see next time around.

What would you repeat? In essence, we are asking what worked well and should therefore be included as part of future training efforts. This is also a pat on the back for anybody who performed well or implemented something beneficial to the training program. We are after opportunities to improve, but there is no reason why we can’t give out credit where it is due.

If they stall or stumble, move on to the next question. Multiple statements are allowed for each question and ‘blanks’ are also permitted (there is no point in forcing someone to come up with something just to fill the list). Allow interjections, but ensure that the pace is maintained throughout.

Once a participant has finished, move onto the next person until everyone has commented. Once the last person has spoken, move onto the next topic.

Allow answers to be repeated, this will help identify strong points or trends and if some points refer to multiple topics, let the contributor refer to the relevant items in the list (but don’t let the agenda get hijacked).

Annotate the responses on the whiteboard for all participants to see. Also make sure that every comment is actionable, so have participants explain why they are criticising. For example “That didn’t work” could be easily expanded by asking “how could it be improved?”, “what components of it did work?”, “what was the impact?” or simply, “why didn’t it work?”.

Close the session

Once all topics have been completed, we then move into the review and conclude part of the meeting. We still want to maintain an energetic pace, so it is important that you don’t get bogged down in discussion. The components of this part of the hot wash meeting are:

- Review and assign priorities
- Explain the follow-up
- Close the meeting.

Review and assign priorities: We now start with the first column (Learn) and ask each participant two questions:

- What had the greatest impact on training effectiveness?
- What most affected you?

The answer may be the same for both questions, but regardless, place an asterisk beside each point that is identified (two if the same point was chosen twice). Each time a point is chosen, add another asterisk to see which points affect the most people in training. Run through all participants on the first column before moving onto the next column (Improve).

Repeat the process for the remaining columns, one at a time so that each participant has a little time to think about their next choices.

Explain the follow-up: Let the participants know that you are now going to use that information to generate an action plan. As a training manager, you may not share their priorities or have the appropriate resources, but you will take on board their suggestions and will implement whatever changes you can to improve the overall training effectiveness.

Set deadlines there and then for releasing your action plan and the minutes of the meeting. Make a commitment to the participants and keep it, otherwise, next time around they will be a little less enthusiastic about contributing.

Close the meeting: Thank the participants for their time and suggestions. Ask them for feed back about the process (not necessarily given right there as they may want to wait for the action plan before commenting).

Phase three: Follow up

It is the events after the hot wash that validate and give value to the entire process as an evaluation tool. If nothing is done with the information generated, then nothing is gained from the resources expended.

KEY STEPS

- TRANSFER AND ORGANISE NOTES
- CREATE AN ACTION PLAN
- PUBLISH AND PROMOTE
- FOLLOW UP

Transfer and organise notes

The hot wash must be documented. Things that seem irrelevant or impractical right now, may be plausible or a solution to another problem at some time in the future. Start with transcribing the notes from the white board or note pad onto something that can be included as an annex to the hot wash report.

Afterward, they can be reorganised to highlight points that were identified as most important (by the asterisks) or to 'score' the training effort for future comparison with similar programs.

Create an action plan

It is now up to you as a training manager to identify what can be done to have the biggest affect, with the least resources, quickly. It is well and good to highlight problems, but if the solution cannot be resourced, there is no point in making promises that cannot be fulfilled.

You will need to apply some common sense to this process. Making changes will incur a cost to the organisation and these must be considered against the actual benefit gained. In addition, the topics have been scored based on the participant's priorities and you will need to identify those that align to the goals of the organisation.

You also shouldn't try to fix everything in one hit. Identify three to five actions that can be implemented and will have a measurable affect on the training. Why three to five? Any less and the effort may appear to be just a token endeavour from the training administrators. Any more and we begin to shake the tree a little too hard. We are after evolution, not revolution.

It is worth considering the student's recommendations with a little more weight than some of the others. It is their training that was conducted and they were in the best position to identify what constitutes effective for them.

Each identified opportunity should be made into a goal or at the very least, an actionable item. This will allow all team members to see that some action is being undertaken to improve the training process. These are the questions I ask myself, in order of relevance, to identify which items to include as part of my action plan.

- What can we do?
- What will yield the best results?
- What will work the fastest?
- What will use the least resources?

The goal is to get something out that will fix a problem right away.

Publish and promote

Publish the results so that everybody can learn from this process. Focus on the learning opportunities and ensure that any personal references are removed or modified. Although it may be possible to infer the identity of a person from the context of the scenarios, it is inappropriate to name or directly identify any of them.

Compiling a formal report is documenting the improvement process. Adapting a scoring system can also quantify progress and promote goal setting. It can also weight individual components of the training and allow you to target specific areas or members for development.

Follow up

Afterward, evaluate your actions and recommendations. Were they implemented as promised? Did they work? Have they opened up new doors (or let a few skeletons out of the closet)? Don't just 'fire and forget', hoping that the group knew exactly what they were doing and what the ensuing consequences would be.

Ask for more advice on changes. This is also an opportunity to get a little feed back on the process your self. Hey, were all still learning here.

Conclusion

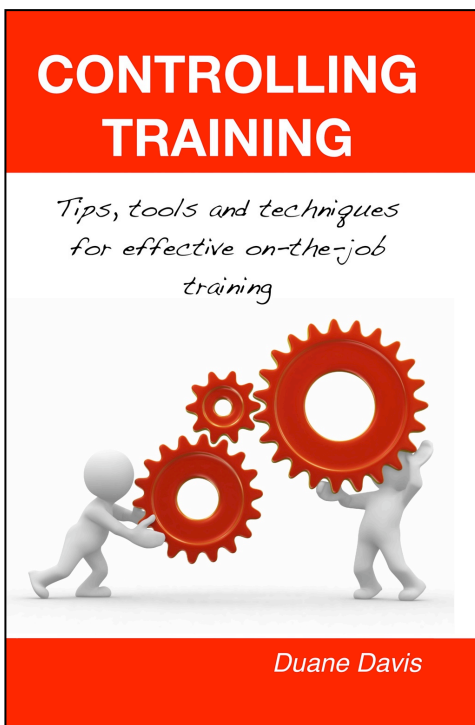
The hot wash can be a valuable training evaluation tool that produces effective results very quickly. It doesn't rely on differentiating trends from statistical variations and the information comes straight from the source. It encourages participation, critical assessment and reflection on learning as well as avoiding the repetition of mistakes.

For the executive staff, it can be insightful and revealing, especially if they are removed from the training environment. For the participants, it is an opportunity to be heard and improve their workplace. However, most importantly, it is a valuable source of suggestions and advice for improving the overall effectiveness of the training effort.

What Now

This e-book is taken from the book "Controlling Training". Along with the Post-training Hot Wash, there are additional templates to cover a range of other tools as well as theory and practical tips to improve your overall training.

Controlling Training is the result of over a decade of experience in training military air traffic controllers, their trainers and their supervisors in 'the real world'. It bridges the gap between the classroom and training on-the-job. It is a practical guide that explains specific techniques and strategies to immediately improve the effectiveness of your workplace training. It is more than just a how to, it is a how to right now.



What's in the book?

- Step by step guides to pre-briefing, OJT, debriefing and reporting
- The four golden rules of learning
- Why students make mistakes
- How to work with other trainers in a multiple trainer team
- How to create and implement a training plan
- How to evaluate training using a post-training hot wash
- Professional development tips for trainers
- Strategies for continuing student development after training
- How to prepare for assessment
- What to do if the student fails

Find out more at www.trainingtools.wordpress.com