

How to squeeze the most out of your training budget WITHOUT compromising training results and quality



Most people would agree (especially us Learning and Development professionals) that the training and development of our workforce is a critical component of success for our organisations. This is especially true today's competitive business climate, where we want to improve gross margins, reduce costs and increase productivity.

However, despite its importance, when times are tough, training and development budgets are amongst the first to be cut. Therefore, it would be fair to say that we are increasingly looking for ways to boost employee performance and effectiveness while working with leaner and leaner resources.

What is also frustrating is that while, intuitively, many CEOs and Leaders understand the value of a skilled workforce, many companies fail to realise the benefits that even minimal improvements in employee skills can make in an organisation and therefore cutting back on training is often not the right answer at all.

However, as Learning and Development professionals we do need to present them with a case that shows how the L&D function can be managed cost effectively without compromising the results or quality of training.

We know the high cost of **NOT** training and as advocates of professional development I am sure you don't need to be told that without a skilled workforce your organisation suffers in the long term.

But there are steps you can take to ensure that you are still able to provide high quality training at a reduced cost and keep developing your most precious asset – your people. You **CAN** stretch your training budget to meet your organisation's learning objectives and professional development goals.

Here are a couple of thought starters for you so that you can keep running effective training **AND** please the purse string holders at the same time!

- **At the risk of offending anyone** - Stop offering boring courses! Many courses offered today are too long, too boring, and 'too PowerPoint'. Courses offered today are often dull and not compelling enough for people to sit through even a half-day of training.



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- If, as L&D specialists, we want better attendance and more ROI from training initiatives, then we need to take a look at how well the courses are delivered and if they are up to speed with current learner expectations.

PS in a survey conducted by Futurethink - a leading innovation research firm....

100% of respondents agreed/strongly agreed that learning in the future will be done in short timeframes, using 'micro modules' to provide more focused learning and achieve better results

- **Offer short refresher courses.** Many people have done the 'standard' training workshops during their career, but perhaps a few years ago. Going on a training program once 5 years ago does not make you an expert, any more than going to the gym **once** makes you fit! We all need to update and refresh regularly. Rather than running a full program consider running say 6 short workshops 3-4 times a year instead (interspersed with the 1 and 2 day programs).

PS While the refresher programs can be face to face (still the most popular) they can also be in the form of webinars, teleseminars or audio recordings. Much less expensive, they require no venue costs and the audio recordings can be listened to when it suits the person. This actually helps to maximize your organisations participation in training as well and get greater critical mass.



- **Increased focus on productivity.** The issue isn't just about how the content is delivered online versus in the classroom — it's about time. No one has 2-3 days anymore to be away from their desk in a training session, unfortunately. We need micro-learning — bursts of focused courses that teach participants just what they want, when they want it. It's like getting the Cliff Notes version of a course in terms of its length, but with the richness and key points of the entire workshop.

Get to the point quicker. Why are some training courses so...long? Many of my clients have commented to me that their training vendors could deliver the same course, more effectively, in a lot less time if they tried. I agree.



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Good course design needs to be pushed to the next level to better respect participants' time — and better leverage their brainpower.

Gone are the days when people could sit in a classroom without multiple interruptions. Stress levels and attention spans being what they are today (short), “micro-courses” are seen as the wave of the future.

- **Run courses that are a lot more participative.** We learn much better when we are actively engaged in our own learning. You can half the time you run a training session in terms of knowledge retention if you get the learner taking responsibility and actively engaging. (And lower the cost) When our clients describe their strongest courses, words/phrases used include: engaging, experiential, team-exercise driven, and balanced (teaching vs. application of content).
- **Encourage participants to network** more between training session and set up self-directed learning groups. When people study for degrees or masters they often expect to do work in their own time and read ‘outside’ the course curriculum. Encourage your staff to have the same mindset when it comes to corporate training.
- **Look within your organisation** – By communicating your training needs to your staff, you can often find the right person from within your own ranks. Aside from keeping expenses down, no one knows your specific training needs better than your own people. Many employees have a wealth of knowledge that may be used in day-to-day activities or shared briefly in meetings but largely goes untapped otherwise. Let employees transfer knowledge in lunch-n-learns or more formal training sessions.
- **Encourage Leaders to facilitate a weekly, fortnightly or even monthly ‘book’ report** in their teams. They can buy a book for each person in their team and have Friday luncheon group discussions. Have one person study each chapter and give a detailed report on it. Have them prepare handouts with charts, graphs, and summary key points of the chapter. People learn something better once they teach it, so get all of your staff involved and rotate the instructor each week.
- **Podcasts** - A series of digital audio or video media files available for download through websites. Podcasts are great tools to have for the workforce to attend at various times due to difficult availability. Podcasts can be available on demand for anytime learning by employees – in the office, during the commute, or at home.



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Podcasts, which offer an alternative to reading that appeals to employees who prefer learning modes, enable employees to learn about issues, innovations, and best practices.

PS Invite employees to organise a gathering in order to listen to a webinar or Podcast together, and then to lead a discussion afterward.

- **Partner with another organisation to share expenses.** Great trainers can be expensive. Consider hosting the training with another organisation to split costs. This practice works best in metropolitan areas with multiple organisations and for more general topics such as Communication, Delegation, Time Management, Running Effective Meetings, Business Writing, etc.
- **Organise a cross-agency meeting** of people who do similar jobs in different areas, so that they can share what works.
- **If you are a private organisation – consider opening your training session up to the general public for a fee**–Not only can this reduce your costs, it can shake up the dynamic of the training group. This can cut the cost by 50-75 percent. Another plus: your program benefits from increased public exposure and goodwill!



- **Finally**– negotiate the best deal from any supplier of training you use.

As a training provider myself I can let you in on the questions that you must ask your external providers.

Do you customise training to suit our requirements?

The whole point of training is that it attains the learning and development objectives that you have set. Your provider should be keen to tailor training to suit your needs. If it's 'normal' tailoring you shouldn't expect to pay any extra either. Many firms will try to charge you extra for this but it should really be part of the service.



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How do you customise?

If the training provider asks you to specify what you want without contributing themselves then they are asking you to do the work for them. They should determine the training requirements in collaboration with you. This will also reassure you about their competence to deliver the training.

How will you check that the learners are taking it in?

The design of the training should incorporate exercises which practice the skills being learnt and demonstrate that the learning is effective. Changing behaviour requires working on the cognitive, the technical and the interpersonal and emotional elements of a learner. Most training only focuses on the first two and then organisations wonder why the training is not working!

Who is the trainer?

The relationship with the person who is actually delivering the training is very important. You should expect to be in contact with them prior to the training and preferably they should be the one to organise any customisation. You should ensure they are subject matter expert and a qualified and experienced trainer. They should also be available for participants to contact before and after the training. Not a fly in / fly out never to be seen again trainer!

What follow up is available after the training?

The provider should have a method of providing support for the learners after the training. Preferably this should be the actual trainer.

If you would like to chat to us about any of the ideas in this report, would like a free 30 minute consultation or simply want more information – please contact us at enquiry@performancepartnership.com.au

or our website www.performancepartnership.com.au

