

FREE e-guide

Achieving Results

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GETTING MORE FOR YOUR MONEY

The changes in Slovenia during the past ten years have already shown us a very different market place, with increased competition, higher levels of service and all of us searching for ways to differentiate ourselves from our competitors.

Differentiation through products, prices and service offerings will become harder and harder. In the end the only thing that each of us has that is truly unique, is our people. Through our people, our employees, we can offer real differences that can make us stand out from the rest.

At Fast Forward we believe the only way to achieve this is through the consistent training and development of your people resources. So, let's consider how to get more from the money you invest in training and developing your most valuable resource.

IS MONEY SPENT ON TRAINING WELL SPENT?

Why do some companies spend money on training and development and others don't? If you do spend money on the development of your people, what do you get in return for this money? In some ways, training can be compared with marketing. Just because you spend large amounts of money on advertising and marketing your company, products, services or brand does not necessarily mean you will generate more business. It depends how the money is spent. Is it targeted and focused on your key business priorities? Is it in line with your business goals? Is it effectively and professionally managed and implemented?

Training is just the same. Spending money on training and development means nothing unless it is in line with your business goals, focused on your key priorities and is professionally managed and implemented for maximum results. Effective and valuable training directly contributes to your business results, helps to address key business problems, compliments your business plans and contributes to current business initiatives.

Having a schedule of standard programmes that your employees choose from, or choosing some 'nice sounding' courses for some of your employees as a way of showing your appreciation for work well done, is a waste of money. Best case the employees will enjoy themselves and they may have a nice day out of the office, they may even learn something. But this rarely translates into improvements in the job and so is ultimately a waste of money.

So, does this mean you should forget about training your workforce and invest your money in something else? Not at all! It simply means that you must carefully manage the learning process to ensure that you get maximum benefits from the money you spend. This means taking the time to ensure that any development you do achieves real results.

HOW CAN WE ENSURE THAT REAL TANGIBLE RESULTS ARE ACHIEVED FROM THE DEVELOPMENT CARRIED OUT?

The following table shows step by step, how we manage the development process, which is driven by how to achieve real business results.

	Business Process	What the Trainer Does	Who's Involved
1	Agree business goals	Consults to understand the business, the current situation, and the current issues or problems, and so clarifies the goal and purpose of training.	Consultant with the Key Business Manager.
2	Define learning goals	Consults to understand the people, their previous experiences, their current competency level and strengths and weaknesses. Defines necessary training objectives and a training plan, including content, style, timings and needed involvement.	Consultant with the participants, Managers of participants and the Key Business Manager.
3	Design learning programme	Develops and writes all training materials, including programme content, handout packs, exercises, pre-programme information and post-programme follow up, according to the agreed training plan.	Consultant confirming details with the Key Business Manager.
4	Deliver programme	Runs the programme, ensuring individual learning in line with business goal.	Consultant and participants plus needed support from relevant Managers or the Key Business Manager.
5	Evaluate results	Conducts review to gain immediate feedback plus a longer-term evaluation to ensure training objectives and business goals are met.	Consultant and Key Business Manager, participants and Managers of participants.

The important thing to note here is that only step four is about actually training. The first three steps are all preparation and the fifth step is follow up. Many organisations spend time only on step four (running courses), sometimes a little of step five (getting some delegate feedback) and a little of step 3 (adjusting a programme) to take into consideration the group to be trained. This is still not focused enough.

HOW IMPORTANT IS PREPARATION FOR TRAINING?

Steps one and two are absolutely crucial. Before you even begin thinking about training courses, your trainer must fully understand your business plan, your key goals, your current problems, and your priorities for the next period of time (short and long term) and of course your people – their experience, their strengths and weaknesses, their problems and difficulties etc.

Based on this knowledge, together you can begin to identify the key areas where training and development practices can help. This is where you need the experience of your trainer or consultant. They must be able to understand your business and then recommend the type of training and development interventions that will help you to achieve the results you want. This process must also involve all the relevant people e.g. Senior Managers, employees, their Managers etc. Talking to people will also help to gain commitment to the training process and will ensure that the trainer is really in touch with the business.

CAN I THEN USE STANDARD TRAINING PROGRAMMES?

Step three is then not about tailoring an existing programme so it covers topics of relevance to you, but really writing and creating a development experience that is totally in line with the business goals and training objectives defined. Again, you will need to rely here on the expertise of your Trainer. But you should also be involved at every step of the way, to ensure that everything is as previously agreed.

WHAT ABOUT ONCE THE TRAINING IS COMPLETED?

After training is delivered, step 5 is then most important. This is not just a simple tick list of whether or not the participants liked the training. Of course, it is important that they did enjoy it and feel that they have learned something useful. But in step five longer term feedback also needs to be gained, from all involved, to review the results of the training in line with the training objectives and the specific business goals.

Step 5 closes the loop. It refers back to everything agreed in steps 1 and 2 and reviews those same things once more to identify changes and improvements. Some of these will be measurable objectively, through statistics and performance indicators. Others will be more subjective, through changes in behaviour, feedback from clients etc. However, if these things have been well defined in steps 1 and 2 you will now be able to see real results from the investment you have made.

WHAT WILL I GAIN FROM THE TIME AND EFFORT I INVEST IN THIS PROCESS?

The benefits are many, big and small, long and short term, tangible and more subjective:

- Business goals achieved.
- Business growth.
- Increased market share.
- Improved customer service.
- Improved quality.
- A focused and motivated workforce.
- A management who lead by example.
- A management who continuously develop their teams.

So, remember that your people are your most valuable asset.
In a changing market place with increasing competition your people can be the best way to differentiate yourself from your competitors.

If you need an in-depth advice on Achieving Results and how to apply it in practise consult the author Pam Welsby at pam@fastforwardonline.com.

