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### Learners Say: Simple Techniques Improve Training

December 23, 2008

g included problem-solving exercises, multiple examples, practice, and  
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perceived job effectiveness.

By Mark Scullard, PhD and Jeffrey Sugerman,  
PhD



This month marks the debut of our column, "Everything DiSC Pulse," in the "Training Today" section of *Training* magazine. Every month, we'll give you the learner's perspective on training: what's important, what works, and what doesn't work for learners. And every month, we'll elaborate on our findings here, online.

For our first column, we asked 4,967 training participants about common training techniques that may have been included in their most recent training experience and how the presence (or absence) of these elements impacted their job effectiveness. (Participants could select as many elements as applied.)

n simply asking if the techniques improved the training experience, we  
d to understand if the rankings could be translated to improved job  
ess. We found that when training included problem-solving exercises,  
amples, practice, and action planning, participants noted a significantly  
greater impact on self-perceived job effectiveness.

#### Problem Solving

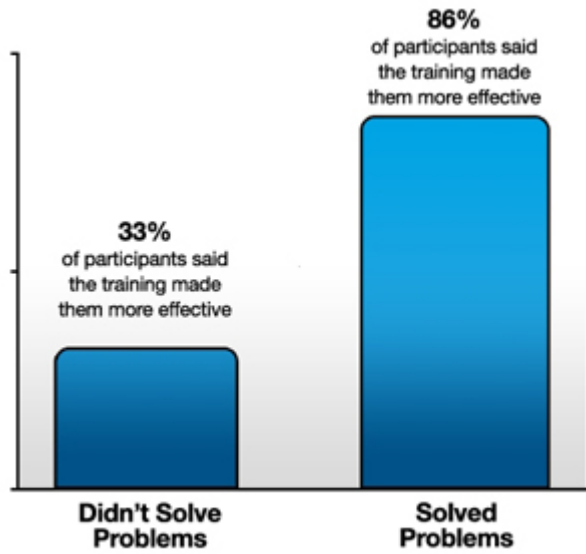
gists know people remember material better when they put effort into  
it. For instance, one classic study found that participants who solved  
grams in their learning remembered significantly more information than  
ants who solved easy anagrams in their learning (Tyler, et al., 1979).

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with a problem-solving task, we engage the material on a deeper level. Information from different angles, think about the big picture, and make connections. All of this work has a payoff. In fact, of all the training practices tested here, problem-solving activities had the biggest influence on training effectiveness.

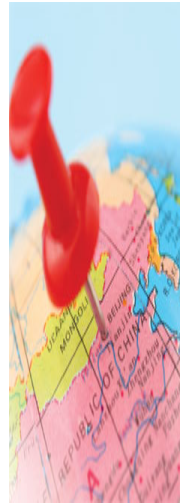
86 percent of participants said their training made them more effective at their jobs when they were challenged to solve problems as part of the training. On the other hand, only 33 percent who were not challenged to solve problems during the training made them more effective at their jobs. As a bonus, problem-solving training seemed to have a big impact on the participants' enjoyment of training.



### Multiple Examples

Another way to increase participants' job effectiveness is by using multiple examples. Now, most of us use examples when we're teaching a new topic. They help participants see issues in a real-life context, and they help make abstract concepts more concrete. But too often we only use one example to illustrate our point. Research has shown that the more examples participants hear, the more they remember. One study found that learners who heard three examples recalled more information than those who heard only one example (Palmer, et al., 1983).

From a cognitive perspective, using multiple examples allows for elaboration. Participants can mentally elaborate on a new idea and connect it with what they already know. In our study, 87 percent of participants who said their training had helped them be more effective at their jobs. By contrast, only 55 percent of those who were not given many examples agreed their training made them more effective at their jobs.



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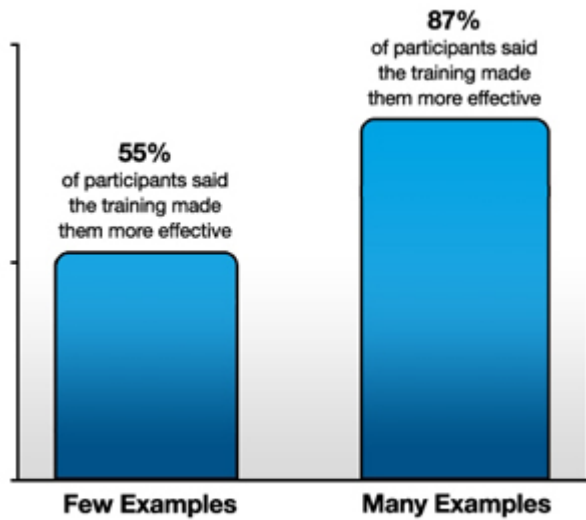
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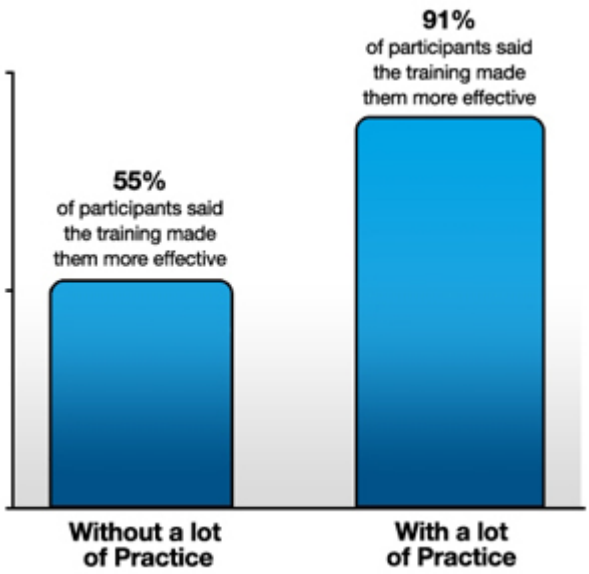
### Practice

Practice in any training is a given—there's a reason we've all heard the adage, "Practice makes perfect." Practice provides participants with the opportunity to get feedback on their mastery of a new skill. If they have difficulty, they usually have support available to tell them what they're doing wrong.

Practice forces participants to internalize the information they have been given. Simply put, the information can't go in one ear and out the other. To truly learn, they must process their new knowledge on a deeper level.

Given that practice is essential to effective training, we were surprised to find that only 55 percent of participants said their last training involved a lot of practice. In our survey, 87 percent of participants who said that they had a lot of practice in their training agreed the training made them more effective at their jobs. On the other hand, only 55 percent without a lot of practice agreed the training made them more effective at their jobs.

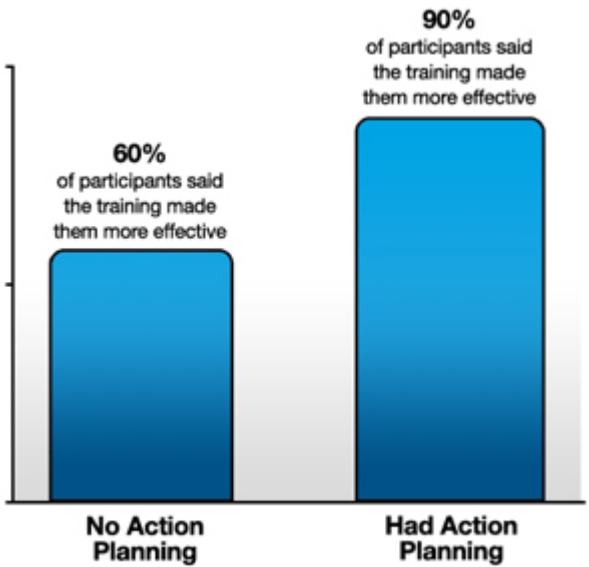
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### Action Planning

A crucial training element we found was action planning. In our study, 90 percent of participants who said their training involved action planning agreed the training made them more effective at their jobs. By contrast, only 60 percent who did not have action planning agreed the training made them more effective at their jobs.

When you create an action plan, participants figure out how they're going to use their new knowledge in their day-to-day life. By imagining how new information will be used in their daily work, participants engage in a deeper level of processing. They are integrating new ideas and skills with existing knowledge. Consequently, this information has more meaning. And participants are more likely to use it in the "real world."



## Bottom Line

Does this mean to you? It means you don't have to tie yourself in knots to deliver more effective, more powerful training. By adding or increasing low-tech training techniques such as problem-solving exercises, giving examples, practicing new skills and knowledge, and incorporating action you can provide learners with training they feel has a greater impact on their job effectiveness.

In "Everything DiSC Pulse," we'll discuss the learner's perception of training content.

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