

Leveraging Manager Involvement for Learning Transfer

3 Tips To Pull Learning Through Your Organisation—A Blueprint for Success

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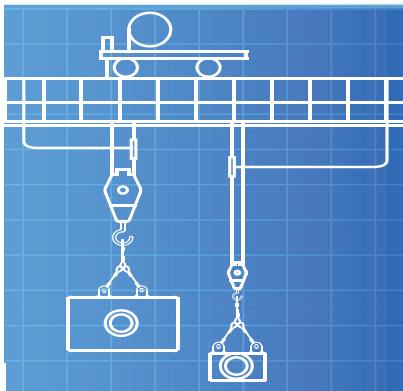
"We also know that without well-engineered organisational alignment, the 'use it or lose it' syndrome sets in."

Conventional wisdom and practical application support the notion that "*no job is too big with the right tool.*"

From our numerous in-depth conversations and best practice sessions with CLOs and training and development directors over the past few decades, we are convinced that "*giving managers coaching skills, along with the right tools at the right time, will yield the greatest learning impact.*"

This collective wisdom holds some powerful implications for organisations wanting to pull learning from a learning event into positive, productive, supported learner application in the workplace.

We all agree that learning transfer is vital—making newly acquired knowledge, skills, and attitudes not just stick around, but also translate into improved performance and bottom line ROI results is not a new concept. We also know that without well-engineered organisational alignment, the "use it or lose it" syndrome sets in. So how can we best leverage (busy) managers' involvement in maximising learning transfer throughout the learning initiative in a way that's efficient and wildly effective? We've honed it down to three practical ways. Please read on . . .



1. Equip Managers with Coaching Skills

Regardless of the training's focus, equipping participants' managers with a structured, methodical approach for learning coaching skills—something as straightforward as an easy-to-remember coaching process—greatly increases the likelihood of managers providing coaching that recognises, reinforces, and/or redirects desired behaviours.

Our research shows that after training the managers in coaching skills, the average performance improvement of direct reports is 18%. Not bad—18%. However, when you compare that to studies in which you train managers in both general coaching skills and how to coach to the specific skills their employees are learning, you get a different picture. Performance improves 42%—or two and a half times more than with coaching skills alone. This brings us to our next point.

2. Enlighten Managers with Knowledge of What Learners Are Learning

A great example of a highly effective coach is James (Doc) Counsilman—a former college swim coach with the best win record in history. Yes, he had great coaching skills, but what set him apart was his knowledge of swimming; he studied, researched, and wrote about swimming.

While not every coach needs the depth of a Doc Counsilman, every effective coach needs to understand the skills he or she is coaching to. Unfortunately, in today's fast-paced and busy work world, we often act as if a "quick overview" of the skills is enough to prepare managers to coach effectively.

Of course, the best case scenario is providing the very opportunity for managers to participate in the learning experience along with their direct reports. That being said, if time, place, or practicality doesn't allow for managers to complete the very same training, there are several other ways to enlighten and involve busy managers.

Consider the spectrum of engaging options for involving managers:

- Concise e-learning modules delivered to managers' desktops, taken when and where they are able
- Training content embedded into the coaching skills development program
- A hands-on role at a learning workshop in which managers act as "table discussion leaders" during skill practice and application exercises
- A front-of-the room role at a learning session in which managers act as a co-facilitator and assist the professional facilitator, especially in the area of guiding and debriefing application exercises
- A thorough program overview delivered face-to-face or via webcast, conference call, or video, at a minimum

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3. Enable Managers with Accessible, Timely Coaching Tips and Tools

The number one reason managers give for not coaching more is, “I don’t have the time!” Being ever mindful of the time crunch faced by overloaded managers, as well as providing tips and tools that solve these time crunches, can boost the amount and effectiveness of their coaching.

“It is easier for a manager to find time to coach six employees for 10 minutes each rather than find time for a 60-minute coaching session.”

Best practices we have learned from organisations to address time issues include:

- Provide managers with “coaching sessions in a box” playbooks that include everything from e-mail invitations to scripts, key coaching questions, and worksheets. This way, managers do not have to create the coaching activity; they just have to deliver it.
- Focus managers on frequent, short coaching conversations rather than long coaching sessions. It is easier for a manager to find time to coach six employees for 10 minutes each rather than find time for a 60-minute coaching session.
- Push out weekly reminders to coach—make coaching not something they do, but who they are.
- Provide video models of short coaching conversations; a major reason managers hold back from coaching is the fear they will do it incorrectly. Modeling videos help overcome that fear.

Manager Involvement Audit		Never Attempted	Some Attempts	Standard Practice			
1.	Executive sponsor sends letter of support to participants linking learning objectives with company strategy.	1	2	3			
2.	Managers are trained in coaching skills.	1	2	3			
3.	Manager makes it clear to the participant what behaviours need to change or improve as a result of the learning.	1	2	3			
4.	Managers serve as “table discussion leaders” or “skill application coaches” during the learning.	1	2	3			
5.	Manager uses on-the-spot coaching tools such as a behaviour checklist, mobile app, or planner.	1	2	3			
Add lines 1–5 to calculate your total		1	2	3			
Interpreting Your Score		Result					
13–15	Scores in this range indicate you are doing a great deal to support manager involvement; you should continue to introduce new technology and tools to maintain high levels of manager support for your learning initiatives, keeping pace with industry best practices.						
	8–12						
	Scores in this range indicate you are making some effort to introduce manager involvement, but that it has not become a standard practice for more of your learning initiatives. You may want to focus on those things that are going well and try to standardise your practices, as well as continue to look for new technologies and tools to improve specific areas.						
5–7		Scores in this range are below average. There are a number of enhancements you can make to improve manager involvement in learning.					

About the Authors

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Michael Leimbach, Ph.D., is Vice President of Global Research and Development for Wilson Learning Worldwide. With more than 25 years in the field, Dr. Leimbach provides leadership for researching and designing Wilson Learning's diagnostic, learning, and performance improvement capabilities. He has managed major research studies in sales, leadership, and organisational effectiveness, and has developed Wilson Learning's Impact Evaluation capability and ROI models. He has served as a research consultant for global clients, is on the editorial board for the ADHR journal, and serves in a leadership role on the ISO technical committee for Standards for Learning Service Providers. Dr. Leimbach is a published author and frequent speaker at global conferences.

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Carl Eidson, Ph.D., is Vice President of Business Development for Wilson Learning Corporation. Dr. Eidson leads and coaches a virtual team of more than 100 independent distributors stretching from Toronto to Bogotá and works extensively with clients. He has authored and coauthored articles for scholarly journals and industry publications on selecting top talent, leadership, sales, virtual teams, and employee engagement. Dr. Eidson is a frequent speaker at professional conferences on the topics of learning transfer and human performance improvement research and practices.

Consider the message and the media. Send the right message at the right time. Keep content chunks small, digestible, and actionable. Provide easy access to planners, behaviour checklists, mobile apps, and other tools.

Assessing Managerial Involvement

So, are your managers prepared for this critical role?

We have captured a handful of the most important actions organisations need to take to leverage managerial involvement and organised them into a **Manager Involvement Audit** (see page 3). This provides a quick assessment of your managers' readiness to support learning.

Never Attempted? Some Attempts? Standard Practice?

Did this quick checkup reveal a vital, robust learning transfer approach that fully leverages manager involvement in your organisation? If so, bravo! If the job seems too big, consider the three practices we described and begin the process of increasing manager coaching, increasing learning transfer, and maximising the ROI of your training efforts by effectively involving managers in learning. After all, no job is too big with the right tools.

*If you would like to take the complete **Manager Involvement Audit** and put some quantifiable numbers around your assessment, contact us to receive a complimentary copy, along with the interpretation of what your score indicates from the **Manager Involvement Scorecard**.*

To learn more, contact Wilson Learning at +44(0) 1494 678 121 or visit our website at WilsonLearning.com.