

# Top 10 Approaches to Training That Lead to Poor Results



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&

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## Top 10 Approaches to Training That Lead to Poor Results

### Introduction

“Lorna Barrow, good morning!” I smiled professionally into the phone.

“I’m glad I caught up with you, Miss Barrow! We have a problem and we would like a session on report writing to fix it!”

I calmly began picking my nails as I tried to recall David Copperfield’s cell phone number to share with the person on the other end of the line. You see, I immediately got a bad feeling about this request because requests like these lead me to refuse potential clients and to claims on their part that I’m only after the big money.

Hi everybody, my name is Lorna Barrow and I’m a Learning Solutions Specialist! This means that I work with you to discover and implement the very best solutions to fill the gaps in your knowledge or that of your staff, so that you and your business can make maximum use of your resources. **I am NOT a magician!**

If the results you get from working with me and my team appear magical it’s only because we (you and us) went through the process of identifying your problem, agreeing the type of solution it needs, inclusive or exclusive of training, and assigning the appropriate resources to guarantee the desired outcomes.

Whenever my colleagues and I discuss the area of training, we invariably lament the many approaches to training and development that lead to poor results for which the Training Provider is almost always expected to shoulder most of the blame.

So join me as I highlight MY **Top 10 Approaches to Training That Lead to Poor Results** and offer some suggestions as to how to fill the room by the next training session.

## 10. The “Menu Approach” to Selecting Training Topics by HR Personnel

The term “**menu approach**” was coined by my good friend and colleague Richie B, out of the frustration we experience in getting some HR personnel to sit long enough to discuss their people problems, and how we can help to solve them.

Instead of working with Training Providers to identify their problems, they seem to prefer to be offered a list of topics, neatly numbered so that they can effortlessly select “5, 8, 17 and 21” Oh! And we’ll have fries with 17! Needs analysis? Girlfriend, it’s only me in charge of these 48 people, you hear!

This approach leads to a hit or miss (mostly miss) on the effectiveness of the training. Employees are usually shoveled into workshops for which they are ill-prepared, to be trained by trainers who have little knowledge of the critical aspects of the business and how to truly help.

The results are frustrated employees who might not have acquired the skills they need, confused HR personnel who provided training to “hard-headed, ungrateful” employees and resentful trainers who delivered to the client’s requirements and are now hearing that their programs are ineffective.

We as trainers can put a stop to this by refusing to accommodate HR personnel in this practice. I know, I know! There is the mortgage to pay, the children to educate, the overseas exotic holidays *and* the reputation to lose.

A much better way of determining where and how a business can benefit from training is to conduct what is called a **training needs analysis**. The good thing is that this needn't be an overly complicated exercise and it will introduce important element of discipline, focus and cost-efficiency into the process.

**Remember:**

*With a bad reputation in an industry in which reputation is everything, if trainers continue to facilitate the “menu approach” pretty soon, they will not even have a menu.*

## 9. Believing Every Performance Problem Can Be Solved By Training

Unfortunately, this is a belief that is held by some trainers as well as many businesses but not every problem can be solved by training. You hear me? *Not every problem can be solved by training!*

Some problems require a [coaching solution](#), some can be directly linked to the systems that are used by the business and in some instances it's a case of poor recruiting that no amount of training will solve any time soon.

At ITDS, ***we don't mess around with this!*** As part of our discovery conversation, we ask questions such as the ones below and we listen carefully to the answers.

- a) *Is there a gap because employees don't know how to do the required work or because they don't want to?*
- b) *Is there a gap because there is no recognition for performing well and/or no consequence for not performing as required?*
- c) *Are your employees intellectually/physically capable of doing the work?*
- d) *Do the employees already have the job knowledge and need the right attitude to complete the work?*
- e) *Are employees positive about their work and intellectual/physical capable of doing the job, but need training to go to the next level?*
- f) *Is your organization ready to reinforce new behaviors?*

The answer to these questions are carefully analysed, the client is advised as to if they have a training need and why we are their [training provider par excellence](#).

### 8. Using Training As A Punishment

Come on Lorna! What are you talking about *this* time? Training as a punishment? No! I say “Yes!”

First you need to understand punishment in this context. Let’s describe it as ***a course of action that is taken after an undesired behavior and is designed or intended to reduce or eliminate that unwanted behavior.***

Now consider the following scenario. A group of unhappy employees complain to their employer about a number of unsatisfactory working conditions. The seething employer demands to know exactly what they want and in unison, they declare “training”.

The employer contacts the next available training provider and request that they provide “training” not exceeding \$X-amount because that is all he’s going to spend on these ungrateful employees. This “training” is provided without any specific need analysis, usually by the approach describe at #10 in this document.

The employees are happy only in the short term and when they try to voice their concerns, they are met with “*you said you wanted training and I gave you training. If it’s not what you want then how can I trust you to know what you want??*”



At ITDS [we facilitate many programmes](#) and topics but we don’t facilitate this!

### 7. Insufficient Interest In Training Transfer

We guarantee our clients that “**what is learnt in our classrooms will show up in your workplace**” and we take full responsibility for that. You see, we understand that our clients want results now! and not e-v-e-n-t-u-a-l-l-y...

So what have we done? We have devised a number of strategies to consistently ensure that training is transferred and everyone gets the results they agreed. Look at just a sample of our strategies:

- **“Learning Contracts”** prior to training. This way participants are sure why they are there and what they are committed to learning.
- **“911” hours built into the proposal.** This way participants can contact us afterwards if they realise they didn't "get" something. In this way, they are less stressed in the classroom and learn more.
- Agree with the employer/organization to **train their staff to industry standards** so that they are also being trained for industry-wide employability and share this fact with the participants.
- Agree with the organisation/participant how **“what is learnt in the classroom will show up in the workplace.”**
- **Creative and unique training methods** based on sound knowledge of adult learning practices to powerfully engage the participants.
- **Spaced practice** with new skills in and out of the training room.

If training transfer is not the underpinning and overarching goal of the training, then training becomes an end in itself and the results can only be poor.

### 6. Poor Programme Design

Sigh! Sadly, I see this again and again and then some more: *A hodge-podge of topics thrown together and labeled “Wonderful Training Programme” on which the follow is evident:*

- a. **Illogical arrangement of topics.** Participants learn best when they can build on previous knowledge and use this to complete a picture that their minds can grasp. When the topics are arranged by the availability of the presenters, the only tangible output is frustration.
- b. **Training methods and material do not reflect the circumstances and culture of the participants/organization.** I see this often in cases where the training provider has bought a license for the training and (s)he delivers it just as it was bought. The problem is though, that many times that content was developed by, let’s say, a U.S firm, for the U.S market and bears little relevance to our Caribbean cultures.
- c. **Long hours and loads of content.** I say to you my fellow trainers, long hours and loads of content is a specific remedy for tired, bored and frustrated participants, poor training transfer and your name on everybody’s how-not- to lips.
- d. **A heavy dependence on power point without knowing how to use it effectively** – I continue to receive many compliments when I don’t use power point and even more when I do. I can engage participants so powerfully and effectively without power point but I also know how to design slides effectively, how to follow the 666 rule, the psychology behind graphics, etc.

A BIG word of caution here: the **power point slides you display are not for you, the Presenter**, they are for the participants. So putting a washpan of information up on your slides and trying to convince me that it is to keep you on track is such a load of bovine feces and with little respect for the bull too!

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### 5. No Correlation Between Training & Corporate/Business Strategies

In my experience most businesses schedule on-site training for one or all of the following reasons:

1. As part of regular employee development
2. To expose a group of employees to the same material
3. To correct a performance gap

The approach is then to survey the employees most likely to be affected and ask them what courses they would like to attend, what they expect to learn, and how that will improve their performance back on the job. This information is then passed to the training provider. No problem.

So what went wrong? **Why is the employer not satisfied?** Her employees have been trained, there is some improvement in their skill and even in attitude but the anticipated growth in the business is way off target.

The problem is that while this approach appears logical at first glance, it leads to poor results because there is no or just a little correlation between the training and the corporate or business strategies and goals of the business.

Small businesses do not have the luxury of training for training sake. While training and development helps in increasing the job knowledge and skills of employees at all levels, it must be tied to bottom line results. In this way, it would help the organization to achieve its long term goals as well.



### **4. Not Knowing What To Measure And How**

So, if the purpose of training is to achieve bottom-line results, what should we measure and how? Well, first of all we should ***measure how and to what extent the training addresses what the organization needs to do to continuously improve results in the future.***

Please understand that a “smile sheet” or even a follow-up survey will not provide the information you’re looking for. What you need is a method that tracks the employee’s “story”. Stated in more technical terms, you need to create a narrative that clearly explains the connecting links between what people learned in the training program, how they applied that learning, and what the effect was on business results.

In addition, this story should describe what the organization did and did not do to facilitate learning and results (e.g., providing an opportunity to apply newly learned coaching skills).

You also need to ***measure the return on your training investment (ROTI)***. Notice that I did not say to measure the cost of training because when companies regard training as ***a cost and not an investment***, that’s a horse of another colour that this little report dare not address.

*What the team at ITDS has done is to adopt a model for measuring the ROTI that quantifies the cost of training, including lost productivity when attending training. It also quantifies the monetary benefits received from training, including new revenue and productivity increase.*

These numbers are then applied in a formula that shows the monetary return on every dollar invested (5:1 or \$5 return on each \$1 spent). This allows us to speak to businesses in a language they understand: dollar\$ and cents.

### 3. Poor Budgetary Approaches To Training

When it comes to training and the budget there is enough angst for me to write a whole new report.

First, there is the claim of how important “our people are to the organization” but when I check the budget, on a good day, training represents at most 5% of the overall budget. But when in a recession or if another area of the operations needs to be enhanced then the training budget is the one that is chopped in a heartbeat. This is what I call the ***Last in First out (LIFO) budgetary approach to training.***

Then there is the situation which obtains in the governmental and not-for-profit areas. For reasons best known to the planners (to me it’s just poor planning) a sum of money is allocated in the budget for training and only maybe one-third is spent in the first 11 months of the fiscal year.

Then as a service provider, ***you are called upon to spend any amount from \$20,000 - \$70,000 in a single month so as to prevent their budget from being cut by this amount in the next year!***

And the one that I truly dislike the most is when ***training providers ask how much is in the budget for a particular item so as to determine how they will charge for providing the service.*** Don’t get me wrong, I’m not saying you should not ask about the budgetary amount allocated to a particular item because I sometimes have to ask myself.

But when I do, it’s for a completely different reason altogether because how I charge for my services is dependent entirely on the value I identify that I can and guarantee my clients that I will add.

With these approaches firmly entrenched in the system, the results? Poor results.

### **2. Training does not address the context of the job**

Admittedly, this one is not as straightforward as the others.

You are a small business, your training budget is equally small or non-existent but you want to develop your employees, so what do you do? You look for a public workshop or a generic training programme which on the surface have the potential to solve the problem.

But let us look closer and I want to use customer service as my example.

***Customer service is not customer service is not customer service.*** It is not the same for a small business as it is for a big business. It's not the same for the hotel industry, the catering industry or the construction industry. How effective then, would be a generic programme called "Customer Service" to any or all of these? The answer would have to be "not very".

A better approach would be to have your needs completely analysed within the context of the job and a programme developed for your workplace to specifically to meet those needs. But this approach will give rise to the question of costs.

At ITDS, we have devised a methodology that addresses this problem, both in terms of the individual business and when we offer public workshops. We urge our fellow trainers to do the same.

**A word of caution to Business Owners & HR Personnel:**

*Before you choose a training programme or method, it is important to determine whether training is necessary.*

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### 1. Poor Selection Of Training Provider

There is little doubt that your choice of service provider is critical to the success of the design and delivery of your training and the transfer of that training from the classroom back to the training room.

So you will forgive me when I am horrified that a potential client begins a conversation by telling me that a service provider has already quoted \$X and if I could quote him \$X-Y he would be so happy. If this is his approach, what do you think would be his results? Yep! I agree with you entirely and that's no way to hire a training partner! I'm not afraid to walk away from this without looking back.

At ITDS we encourage our clients to ask us all or any of the following questions:

1. What results have other clients had from your programs?
2. What was your responsibility for getting those results?
3. How are your programs different from those offered by other private and tertiary training providers?
4. How can you help us choose the right program?
5. What kind of materials do you provide?
6. How interactive is your course?
7. How much experience do you/your instructors have?
8. May we talk with the instructor(s) before class?
9. How will you help us to get participant buy-in?
10. How will you ensure that what is learnt in your classroom shows up in our workplace?

***We answer these questions honestly and completely so that when you begin working with us you start on a foundation of transparency and accountability.***

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### *Final reminder...*

Training and development of yourself and your employees is the single greatest investment that you can make to grow your business.

Unfortunately, because small businesses in particular have not learnt how to implement it effectively, the training itself is blamed for any unsatisfactory outcomes.

***A critical aspect of training*** is moving it from the classroom to the workplace and if you had to establish a single measurement for the effectiveness of training, it would have to be around this area.

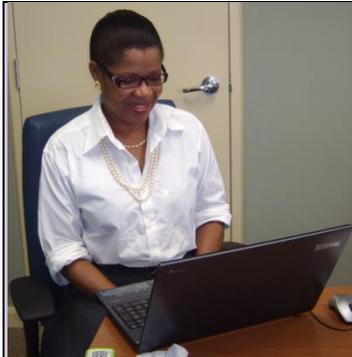
Appraisal of “all things training” is necessary as well, and management cannot be exempt from this. They should be evaluated to make sure that as leaders, they are able to motivate staff, offer believable leadership, communicate persuasively and set the business realizable objectives and strategies.

***When you understand these fundamentals you will get a bigger **ROTI!*****

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### About the authors



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**Lorna Barrow** is a Learning Solution Specialist specializing in providing training and

development solutions through her business **Impact Training & Development Services (ITDS)** for organizations and individuals in the Caribbean.

Lorna is an entrepreneur and small business owner whose pension plan is to establish and manage 7 businesses and share her knowledge with other small business owners.

Her home base is the beautiful Caribbean island of Barbados from where she connects with the rest of the world. She believes that you owe it to yourself to consciously create the life you want rather than living the one you believe you inherited.

Now she has seriously put **“fingers to keyboard”** to bring you many, many wonderful resources which you can use to make life easier, happier or even wealthier.

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**Reviewed By:  
Richard “Richie” Blades**



Meet my Training Associate, Business Partner and Friend, Richard Blades!

“Big Richie B”, as he’s affectionately called, likes to joke about his name claiming that whether you read “Richard” backwards or forwards, it’s hard to be rich! But he lives up to his name in a classroom, bringing a richness to training by organizing and delivering information in such a way that it’s not hard to learn and retain what you learn.

He has a manner that motivates virtually everyone with whom he comes in contact and helps those who really want to move on in life to do so. He believes that **training should accomplish results**, and this quality is rapidly making him one of the **most effective speakers/trainers for hospitality, tourism and business organizations** in the Caribbean.

When I asked him if he could review this report for me he replied “It’s the next best thing to writing it myself!”

Naturally, I’m delighted to have his inputs.

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