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Learning is a Process

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As appeared in on www.reliableplant.com

Learning that changes behavior to produce results is a process - not a single event. The process takes place in an environment replete with competing priorities and time pressures. Learning is more than simply taking a class. When attending a class, retention and application of the new knowledge and skills will vary from 10 to 30% based on the type of class and content. Two factors heavily influence the extent to which the training is applied – retention and management support. When retention strategies and management support beyond the classroom experience are included in the learning initiative, the application of new knowledge and skills will be much higher, often 90% or better.

The learning process has three phases:

> **Phase 1** (before training) is when the prior knowledge and experience of the participant is aligned with his or her manager's expectations. Phase 1 clearly defines what is expected of the participant.
>
> **Phase 2** (training) is the class or learning event that has active, measurable learning objectives. The learning objectives are designed to advance desired business results.
>
> **Phase 3** (after training) is the follow through and application. The participant applies the new skills and knowledge is encouraged and supported by management and/or coaches.

High Impact Learning (HIL) increases results by applying proven retention and management support processes before and after class. HIL is proven to raise the retention and application of the new knowledge and skills. The following are examples of HIL tools that the Life Cycle Institute uses in Phases 1 and 3:

Learning Impact Maps (LIM)

A table or document that:

- Facilitates management support and expectations alignment
- Identifies if the training can achieve the desired results in terms of broad business goals
- Prepares participants to learn and change their behavior based on the training
- Links the desired behavior with organizational performance and business goals

A well-written LIM always shows:

- Knowledge and skills the participant will learn in the training
- Behaviors driven by the new knowledge and skills
- Results that will be realized by the new behaviors
- Goals of the organization that the results will help accomplish

As an example, here's how Learning Impact Maps are used when organizations choose the HIL approach with the Life Cycle Institute:

Before Training

The organization's training sponsor works with the Institute to create a LIM with the first and last columns completed focusing on the top three to five items in each column. The first column is based on the stated learning objectives of the training program. The last column is the highest measureable organizational goal that the training results are designed to advance.

The training sponsor schedules time with the managers of class participants to describe the managers' role and secure their commitment to fulfill it. They cover the following with the manager.

- Review the organizational goals
- Describe the training learning objectives
- Impress on the manager how their engagement will impact the desired behavior change
- Demonstrate how to "read" the LIM
- Provide questions to use in the pre-training meetings with participants, including:
    1. What are the business results you personally impact the most?
    2. What are the key areas of training that can impact these results?
    3. What are some actions you might take after training to reach these results?

Three to seven days before the class, the manager leads a meeting with the participant to complete the LIM. The meeting is conducted in person or over the telephone and can be as short as 15 minutes. Once the LIM is completed, the training sponsor collects copies for each participant and delivers copies to the class facilitator. The manager's involvement in Phase 1, prior to the formal class, is the single most powerful influence on learning transfer.

During the Training

Class participants update and revise their LIMs as necessary based on what they have learned in the class. The class facilitator collects copies of the revised LIMs.

After Training

The class facilitator provides the training sponsor or managers with a copy of their participants' updated LIMs. The training sponsor then reminds managers to schedule a follow up meeting within the first week after the training. The training sponsor provides the manager with a list of questions to use in their post-training meetings.

1. What did you think of the training?
2. Why did you make the changes to your LIM?
3. What are the potential obstacles?
4. How can I support you?
5. Ask the employee to summarize the actions he/she will take to implement learning and summarize the actions you will take to support them.
6. Agree on how you will jointly monitor/measure progress.

The manager leads a meeting with the participant and documents the results.

The training sponsor follows up with the managers seven to 10 days after the training to find out:

1. If they have met with their program participants
2. How the conversations went (what went well, what could have gone better)
3. Address any concerns/questions

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Learning Impact Map

Name: Date:

What I will learn	What will I do with my learning	What results will I get	Organization goals

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Follow Through

The greatest barrier to learning transfer is lack of reinforcement on the job. All research on why training programs fail to achieve the desired results includes this as a top factor.

Follow Through is a management system specifically developed to support learning transfer following training and development initiatives. Follow Through has been shown to increase post-course effort, enhance interaction with managers, accelerate progress and increase ROI.

Incorporating Follow Through to a learning initiative will:

- Improve the return on investment by actively supporting participants' transfer and application of what they learned in the program
- Document the actions participants take to apply new learning and the results they achieve
- Support developmental communications between program participants and their coaches and managers
- Extend learning back to the workplace
- Create an on-going community of learners

- Encourage peer coaching
- Provide learning and business leaders with tools to evaluate the quality and quantity of learning transfer and coaching
- Provide data on developmental goals, efforts, and impact to continuously improve future iterations of the program

The Life Cycle Institute uses a tool created by Fort Hill to implement a Follow Through program. Follow Through is a web-based follow-through management system specifically designed to accelerate learning transfer and improvement following training and development initiatives.

The system has five key components:

- A simple, fast, and intuitive interface that participants use to report progress on their objectives, plan next steps, and request guidance from a coach or manager
- An automated system that reminds participants to follow-up on their development objectives
- A competency-specific, just-in-time guidance system that offers relevant content to aid action planning and continued development
- A shared learning function that supports a community of practice and encourages peer-to-peer learning and coaching
- A *LeaderView™* dashboard that allows program leaders and other authorized personnel to review the progress of the group and individuals, quickly analyze activity, and provide individual coaching or other appropriate intervention

Briefly, the process works as follows:

Image from FortHillCompany.com

1. <u>Prepare Participants</u>: The expectation of follow-through and learning transfer is communicated in pre-course materials and introductory comments. During the program, facilitators:

- Remind participants of the investment the company is making in them
- Encourage them to consider how they can best apply what they learn
- Stress the importance of follow-through to maximize the value of their attendance
- Briefly introduce the *Follow Through* process
- Help participants set strong and meaningful goals

2. Set Goals: Participants commit to applying what they learned in the program to accomplish one or two specific goals based on their developmental needs and business priorities. Their goals are collected and sent to Fort Hill, which establishes an account for each participant and enters his/her goals into *Follow Through*.

3. Engage managers and coaches: Prior to the program, managers are provided information about its objectives and the importance of their encouragement and support. Following the program, each participant's manager(s) and/or coach(es) are sent a link to the participant's goals that includes an easy-to-use on-line form for comment and feedback.

4. Update Progress: On a set schedule - typically every other week - participants are reminded of their goals and sent a link to their personal *Follow Through* site.

   On the site, they are prompted to report progress on each of their goals and their action plans for the coming period. Updates take only 10 minutes or so to complete.

5. Receive on-going coaching and feedback: After completing each update, the participant will be encouraged to send a link to his/her manager and coach seeking on-going counsel and guidance.

6. Continue Learning: Participants continue learning during the follow-through period. *Follow Through* includes an innovative feature called *GuideMe*® that provides practical, specific actions a user can take to improve in specific competencies. In addition, they will be able to view and learn from the actions and successes of other participants in their cohort.

7. Monitor Progress and Results: Designated members of the learning team and business managers have access to *LeaderView™*, which provides a dashboard and details of goals, progress and participation in the follow-through process.

8. Success Stories: On the final update, participants summarize their experiences, achievements, and lessons learned. These summative reports help identify 'success cases' that illustrate the program's impact as well as identify the factors associated with the best achievements so that they can be enhanced in future iterations.

The Life Cycle Institute has found that implementing tools such as Learning Impact Maps and Follow Through to address Phases 1 and 3 of the learning process raises the return on learning investments.

To learn more about learning as a process read *The Six Disciplines of Breakthrough Learning* by C. Wick, R. Pollock, A. Jefferson, and R. Flanagan.

For more information on Learning Impact Maps take a look at the work of R. O. Brinkerhoff in *High Impact Learning* and M. L. Broad in *Beyond Transfer of Training.*

About Bill Wilder

Bill Wilder is the Director of Education at Life Cycle Engineering (LCE). Bill holds a Masters of Education degree from East Tennessee State University. As Director of Education, Bill manages LCE's Life Cycle Institute, the leading source for Reliability Excellence training. The Institute was created in response to the need for a life long learning resource for people engaged in optimizing asset reliability and performance. Bill's facilitator's utilize adult learning methods that minimize lecture and emphasize learning by doing. His courses are specifically designed to be "active training" programs.

Prior to working with LCE, Bill worked as the Director of Sales and Marketing at Greenville Technical College where he created the Asset Performance Institute in collaboration with Fluor. He established a successful speaking, training and consulting practice focused on communications and sales skills.

Bill's experience also includes managing sales teams in four states while working with AT&T. He produced over $100 million while receiving the company's highest sales award four years in a row. He also created the national Sales Manager Certification program, developed a sales candidate assessment process and developed the Excellence in Sales training course.