It's no barrier: best practice in learning & development for all learners regardless of age

'Top ten tips' for training providers and managers

1. Demonstrating return on investment and cost effectiveness of training

- Training is value for money only if it makes a positive difference to the service provided.

- Managers need training to do more than simply meet regulatory requirements. Effective high quality training can be a tool to improve retention, improve the skills base of the staff team, and enhance specialist skill areas in addition to meeting regulatory requirements.

- Demonstrable outcomes should be evidenced for both the individual learner and the organisation commissioning the training.

- Effective evaluation needs to go beyond 'happy sheets'. If the training provider is not in a position to do this directly, it is good practice for trainers to recommend ways in which managers can evaluate the impact that the learning has made to an individual or the organisation as a whole.

- Both trainers and managers need to be clear what the learning outcomes are and clearly state the expected return on investment. To assist workforce planning, employers need to be clear about the outcomes they wish training to achieve for the workplace.

2. Business models which facilitate learning

- Managers need to have systems in place to follow up the effectiveness of training in the workplace. Identifying and making available in-house mentors and learning champions can assist in this process.

- Training needs to be responsive to the demands of job roles in the current climate. Some employers may require only certain units rather than whole qualifications in order to satisfy their workforce plan.

- The demographics of the workforce can impact on workforce development. Different age groups should not be stereotyped for their suitability for specific types of learning. For example, e-learning being seen as appropriate only for younger, not older, workers; or apprenticeships only for people under 25. Trainers and managers may need to provide different support mechanisms for different learners, but this is the case at any age. Do not allow age to become a barrier.

3. Strong partnership between employer and training provider

- Training providers should work in partnership with employers as much as possible.

- Training providers that understand and can respond to the ethos, mission and values of an organisation can provide more tailored development opportunities. This can improve the chances of repeat business for training providers and improve the likelihood of increasing the return on investment for the organisation.

- Effective and efficient learning delivery utilises prior learning and achievement and reduces the unnecessary duplication of learning. This should benefit both the training provider and the organisation.

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4 Promoting a positive attitude to learning

- Trainers and managers need to have an awareness of learners' self belief and fear of 'getting it wrong'. This may have little to do with the ability of the learner.

- Cultural differences and expectations, nationality of the learner and prior experience or expectations, or other social norms can all make a difference to learning.

- Individual skills analysis and providing or assisting the means to improve life skills prior to embarking on learning is important, especially where there is an expected level of literacy and numeracy as an outcome (so not setting people up to fail, or accepting less than the required standard which has the potential to dilute the skills of the workforce). This all demands effective initial assessment.

5 Adaptable learning to incorporate a range of learning styles and needs

- Blended learning combines different methods of learning such as combining e-learning and face to face learning. Providing a variety of ways in which learning can be delivered enables a wider range of learning styles to be accommodated. This can reduce the time necessary for face to face learning, facilitate more 'out of hours' learning and development, and allow more opportunities for reflection, especially if a mentor or lead assessor helps the learner to make links between the different types of learning.

- Recognising informal learning in the workplace, and being able to capture this, is an important way of linking theory to practice.

- Acknowledging transferable skills from other areas of life, particularly for older workers, shows a pragmatic approach to learning and development, and helps to engage learners, increasing their interest and confidence.

6 Good procedures and materials help reduce barriers to learning

- In order to reduce some learners' resistance to completing workbooks or completing e-learning, it is necessary to provide support and opportunities for feedback on the experience. It is always beneficial for learners to have some constructive written or verbal feedback in addition to a score or mark on a workbook. Workbooks and e-learning completed with no additional support and no follow-up can be isolating for many people, leading to a less positive learning experience.

- Initial assessment of learners is important before any learning and development is embarked on. This should be seen as an important function of both a manager and a training provider. If a learner has specific learning needs, these need to be either addressed or catered for when any learning and development is started.

- Learning needs to be provided at a level and in a way which makes sense to the learner. It needs to have a context, and be applicable to the environment in which the learner is working. Language should where possible be jargon-free and, where necessary, an explanation of terms used should be provided.

- Learners should be aware from the start of the expected assessment or marking strategies and appeals procedures. If these are not clearly explained much time and energy can be wasted by the learner producing evidence which does not meet the expected standards, and then has to be repeated. This creates an unnecessary duplication of effort, creating a barrier to learning.

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7 Increase opportunities for learning through access to a variety of resources and work tools

- Training providers should be able to adapt programmes of learning to meet the needs of participants.

- Arrangements should be in place for the joint support and nurturing of learners by both the training provider and the workplace management.

- Any new development plans should build on the learner's or the organisation's previous learning and make planned learning a positive experience.

- Providing suitable and adequate learning resources (e.g. IT, study areas, resource library) for learners in the workplace demonstrates a management commitment towards learning and development.

8 Using examples in training that have relevance for the learner

- Real life examples, whether sector- or client group-specific, which have been reflected on help to maximise learning.

- Match equipment and resources to the subject, particularly for practical skills such as moving and assisting a person.

9 Inclusivity and valuing learners

- Increase learners' sense of inclusivity in the learning process by establishing clear ground rules and individual learning plans which have meaning to each learner.

- Effective learning needs to be a three-way partnership between the learning provider, the learner and the employer.

- Utilise the skills and knowledge within group learning activities to increase the knowledge and understanding of the group as a whole. Trainers don't always have all of the answers. Facilitate group discussion to increase learners' sense of being included and valued.

10 Promoting knowledge transfer

- There need to be stated expectations about the transfer of learning to work practice when designing a learning activity.

- Knowledge transfer should be one of the evaluated outcomes in all learning activities, clearly establishing a return on the investment in the learning provision.

- An individual's learning aims should be discussed with them prior to attending a learning event, in order to establish desired outcomes and relevance. This discussion should be repeated after the learning event through formal evaluations, or recorded discussions in supervision, appraisals, etc.

- The potential for progression should be considered. Progression can be either 'parallel', such as specialising in a specific skill to enhance either individual or organisational performance in a current role, or 'developmental' such as enabling the learner to take up a new role in a revised system of work or to become a mentor or 'champion'. Informal progressions can be created to support the achievement of a specific goal or service need, such as care ambassadors, dignity champions, e-learning champions, etc.