

"NOT ANOTHER SEMINAR!"

Real-World Solutions to the Top 4 Problems with any Training or Coaching

By Steven Gaffney

"Oh no. Not another seminar!" If we haven't had the thought ourselves, we have certainly overheard the sentiment expressed in the hallways. Failed seminars, wasted offsite meetings, complicated training sessions, and pointless conferences have conditioned us to resent the time these activities demand.

Just think of a time you attended a seminar or coaching session that seemed interesting at the time, but when you woke up the next day you realized you could not remember a thing you learned,

much less how to apply it. Or worse, you may remember a time you walked out of a seminar and immediately knew it was a waste of your time.

That is the very outcome that everyone – from leaders to meeting planners to participants – desperately wants to avoid. And yes, the good news is that such outcomes *are* avoidable!

While some companies still believe that employees should arrive already trained and job-ready, great companies offer effective training for employee develop-

ment. There is no denying that training is necessary for growth and progress, but not just any training. It takes the right kind of training.

In my nearly twenty years experience conducting seminars, workshops, and executive coaching with senior leaders down to entry level employees, I have learned the necessary techniques to make training "stick." In speaking with my Fortune 500 and government clients about their training experiences, I have heard firsthand the top mistakes common to all ineffective training. I have also heard the

most frequent complaints from seminar or training participants. Avoiding these common problems could be the difference between wasted time and resources and a productive seminar – one that resonates with participants and produces a high return on investment of your training dollars.

Problem #1: Past the Expiration Date

No one likes biting into stale potato chips or taking a swig of spoiled milk. The same is true for participating in training or attending offsite seminars with stale content. Such training only leaves a bad taste in participants' mouths.

Training sessions or seminars must have new ideas and a fresh perspective to capture and hold participants' attention. Otherwise, the content will go in one ear and out the other.

Organizations tend to repeatedly bring in the same experts as everyone else in their particular industry. Although industry experts bring industry knowledge, they often bring industry blind spots and preconceived notions into their training sessions ... and that could limit your participants' problem-solving skills.

Worse yet, if your organization continually brings in the same type of industry experts, participants may approach training sessions thinking, "Well, I bet we have heard all of this before." They will check out and disengage.

Another warning sign that you are relying too heavily on what has always been done in the past is hearing people say, "That will never work here." An attitude like that may signal that it is time to shift to a different approach to training.

One way to avoid stale training, whether it is being provided by internal resources or an external expert, is to bring in best practices from outside your organization and industry. Doing so eliminates inbred thinking. It opens your eyes to possible solutions from other markets and will likely generate some out-of-the-box strategies.

As a friend once said, "You cannot see the big picture if you are in the picture." If you are in the government contracting industry, are you willing to look at best practices from the hospitality industry? If you are in the insurance industry, are you willing to look at best practices from the financial industry? That kind of cross-pollination may bring just the creativity and fresh ideas you need.

Problem #2: One Size Fits All

No two companies, agencies, or organizations are exactly alike. Each has its own set of challenges and goals. Therefore, training and seminars must be customized to meet your organization's unique objectives and overcome your audience's particular obstacles. When it comes to training, one size does not fit all.

Generic training produces generic results. For example, consider leadership development programs. A common complaint we hear is that organizations tend to offer the same supervisory training for all employees regardless of each employee's particular learning style, goals, challenges, personal weaknesses, strengths, and so forth. Conducting "cookie cutter" training sessions that are exactly the same for everyone will not produce the results you want. Generic

strategies or solutions are easy to forget and difficult for participants to implement since they do not apply to their specific needs.

Many companies have their own approach to avoiding the "one size fits all" mistake. For example, our company utilizes our "Inside-outside Customization Approach™" to discover participants' unique challenges, weaknesses, and goals prior to delivering the seminar. Whatever your process, get to know the audience and participants beforehand in order to adapt the seminar or coaching to effectively address the group dynamics and obstacles. That way, examples are pertinent to the audience's world, making them relatable and memorable. This leads to an engaged audience and a seminar that comes to life.

Problem #3: Muddy Waters

Confusing information causes delay or, worse, inactivity, as well as ineffective results. And what causes confusion? Too many broad concepts, vague ideas, or over-complicated tactics and techniques thrown at you at once. All the information begins to muddy the waters, making it difficult to gain clarity or take action.

No matter how interesting a seminar may be, if participants do not leave with a clear understanding of how to implement the strategies, the seminar was a waste of time and resources. If tactics are not easy to remember and use, then participants will not use them because they do not have the time to figure them out on their own. For example, consider traditional training on identifying and analyzing different personality traits. It may be

useful, insightful, and interesting, but people may leave the session unsure how to effectively analyze on the fly. For that reason, they may not use what they learned.

For effective training, simplify content and provide specific, tactical strategies that are easy to understand and execute. Training must be easy for participants to apply to their particular jobs. When that happens, participants leave seeing the value in what they learned and equipped with new skills to take on challenges they were previously unprepared to combat.

There are many techniques we have used or witnessed that help clear the waters so training is easy to implement in the workplace. One technique that is easiest to implement is to structure training in such a way that allows participants to choose the case study rather than having the presenter, speaker, trainer, or coach provide a case study. When participants select a case study they can relate to and are properly guided through it, they can then see exactly how to apply it in their world.

Another simple technique for providing clarity is to implement what we call the “Teach Back” technique. At the close of a longer session, participants should form small groups and teach back the main highlights from the seminar. This allows them to review their notes to ensure they clearly understand the key messages and how to execute the techniques or strategies.

When information from training, seminars, or coaching is easy to implement, participants can begin practicing their new skills immediately and frequently, allowing those new skills to quickly become habits.

Problem #4: It's Over When It's Over

Too often, training ends when the seminar ends. There is no follow-up from presenters to see how things are going or to address any needs or questions that may have come up after the seminar. Likewise, participants are not held accountable to implementing and developing the new skills. Lack of accountability – for presenters as well as participants – can severely reduce the effectiveness of the seminar.

Think of it this way: one training session without reinforcement or accountability is equivalent to being trained on gym equipment and then never going back to use it. It is a step in the right direction, but there will be no results unless there is reinforcement to make it a habit.

To make matters worse, research shows that when people are stressed (which many are in the workplace), they tend to fall back on old, sometimes bad, habits. This makes reinforcement and accountability even more important for new training to be successfully embraced, implemented, and sustained.

Many systems and techniques exist to enforce accountability, such as our own specialized coaching and accountability programs. Whatever your approach, ensure follow-up coaching allows participants to privately discuss personal challenges because some may not feel comfortable having that discussion in a group setting. Also, follow-up coaching sends the message that participants are expected to use what was learned in the session. If participants are proactively seeking further coaching, that's even better!

A well-trained workforce is a workforce ready to meet challenges with creative and effective solutions. Providing education and training is valuable, but simply providing it is not enough. The seminar needs to be tailored and clear so all participants can make the best use of it and so you can reap a full return on your training dollars. Avoid these common training problems and you and your organization will ensure that your training, seminar, or coaching is useful and effective. That kind of valuable training is the right fertilizer for the growth and progress your organization seeks.

Steven Gaffney is a leading expert on honest, interpersonal communication, team performance, leadership, and change management. He has worked with numerous Fortune 500 organizations to increase revenue and drive profit, as well as with many governmental agencies to better allocate resources and taxpayer dollars. Thousands credit Gaffney's seminars, media appearances, books, and products with making immediate and lasting changes in both their organizations and personal lives. He is the author of two groundbreaking books, *Just Be Honest* and *Honesty Works*, and the co-author of *Honesty Sells*. For more information, please visit www.StevenGaffney.com.

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WHO WE ARE

- We are a full service speaking, consulting and executive coaching company that teaches open, honest communication to help organizations increase teamwork, collaboration, revenue and profits.
- Founder Steven Gaffney is one of the nation's leading experts on honest, interpersonal communication, team performance, leadership and change management.
- For nearly twenty years, we have worked with Fortune 500 organizations to increase revenue and drive profit, as well as with governmental agencies to better allocate resources and taxpayer dollars.

“The **strategies** that Steven teaches are very **powerful** and have been extremely effective in changing our communication style, enabling us to have our **best quarter ever!**”

– Chuck Zang

“Your communications seminar I took **almost nine years ago** is still the most **practical, powerful, and immediately useful** training course I have ever taken.”

– Scott Ingersoll

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Notice v. Imagine

Eliminate misunderstandings, bad assumptions and damaging personality clashes so you can build thriving, innovative teams that get things done.

Inspiring Excellence: Leading and Motivating through Honesty

Uncover winning strategies, techniques and tools that great leaders use to inspire amazing results in others.

Influence With or Without Authority

Learn key strategies and techniques to build sincere relationships and influence people in a non-manipulative manner, as well as how to dissolve resistance and resolve objections.

WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT

In addition to being client-focused, outcome driven and tactical, the following approaches set us apart:

- **Outside-Inside Customization Approach™** – Our experience with diverse clientele eliminates in-bred thinking and provides a fresh perspective. Our extensive research and interview process enables us to create a customized seminar.
- **Unlimited Lifetime Support** – We guarantee the effectiveness of our strategies for the lifetime of participants and offer unlimited support after the seminar.

OUR PRODUCTS

Thousands credit Steven's books, live seminars, media appearances, audio-seminars, coaching and other products with making immediate and lasting changes in both their organizations and personal lives.

