



Practitioners as Trainers – Bringing “the Real World” to Life

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This article was originally printed on Trainingmag.com in November, 2006 under the title **Walking the Talk in Training**

The Training Gap

The twenty-something trainer with the exuberant and bubbly personality bounces at the podium. He is spouting the latest framework and management buzzwords to a rapt audience. The materials are flawless and the theory makes a ton of sense. From the back of the room comes the killer question: “so I get the framework, but **how does it actually apply to the work I do every day?**” The trainer struggles to articulate a single instance of how he’s used the framework in day to day work environments. Why? Because he never has – his entire career to date has been spent behind that podium.

Enter “The Practitioner”

There is a rare breed of instructor out there known as **the practitioner**. He or she has been classically trained on fundamental frameworks, methodologies, theories and tools. They’ve applied those concepts and tools in real world business situations. These are the people whose resumes are testaments to the impact they’ve had: bottom line savings; reorganizations; strategic plans and step-change business improvement.

They are the ones who drive change in their companies. They are so valuable to the teams they lead that they spend their careers moving into positions of increasing responsibility. Unfortunately, few of them are given a chance to train the next generation of leaders because they are too busy “doing their day jobs.”

One organization that clearly “gets it” when it comes to using practitioners as trainers is the U.S. Army. Almost every Army school is staffed by experienced soldiers who not

only know the theory but have applied it in actual field situations. They can vividly articulate how theory applies to the real world which aids student comprehension and retention of the materials (not to mention making class more interesting to listen to).

Practitioners exist in business as well. Arguably, these individuals are the best source of training cadre a company could ask for. Their combination of deep understanding of frameworks, practices and theories and how they apply in the real world is an untapped resource that many companies fail to utilize. The challenge is how to free them up from their daily responsibilities to enable them to train people. This leaves companies with three options:

1. Do nothing and stick with “career trainers”
2. Free these individuals up to train the organization or
3. Find practitioners from “the outside” to partner with the company to train its people

The Risk of “Doing Nothing”

Continuing to use “career trainers” for training delivery will generate the same predictable results all other companies enjoy. But, in an increasingly competitive world, this does not confer a competitive advantage to your company from training.

Practitioners from Within

To successfully transform your existing practitioner talent base into functioning trainers that still have business impact day to day, several conditions must exist or be put in place. First, you must identify practitioners who have platform and training skills and who would enjoy developing the next wave of the organization’s talent. Second, training must

be recognized in their results. Practitioners focus on what is important for the company (which is what shows up in their appraisals). If they are given “credit” for training others, their tendency to do so increases. Third, their successes must be publicized. This attracts other practitioners to follow their lead and train.

These conditions were in place for me at a previous company. I ran a large division but once a month I taught courses to develop our people. The training showed up in my review as a very positive contribution to the company and I was praised publicly for my course (leading other practitioners to enter the ranks of our internal trainers). I was able to personally train over 1,000 associates while still doing my “day job.”

Practitioners from Outside

If you are unable to find practitioners within your company, going external is a viable option. Look for firms whose instructors have proven track records of business impact. Good things to look for are P&L management and **direct experience** with the materials they teach. Ask them not only about the methodology but also for real examples of how they have **personally** applied it in the work they do.

Finding a practitioner who has “been there and done that” to train your organization will lead to higher satisfaction with the training provided and increased application of trained concepts in peoples’ jobs. Regardless of how or where you get them, practitioners bring something to the classroom that other trainers cannot: a healthy dose of the real world.