

# Checking Your Training Evaluation Defaults

By Jim Kirkpatrick, Ph.D.



My computer has numerous default settings that are designed to make life easier for me. Yours has them, too. They take us to a familiar home page, recommended font and suggested paragraph settings.



Defaults may be set by the manufacturer or the software provider. Most often, we can “opt out” of their recommendations and select our own if we know how to do it. Sometimes my default settings change and I am not sure why or how. The other day, I found that I could no longer save drafts to my desktop. Try as I might, I could not do it. My IT consultant showed me that somehow (and he looked suspiciously at me), a “check” was in the default box saying that I could only save to folders. He unchecked the box and I could again save drafts to my desktop.

Defaults are the first choice for how to proceed with computer applications. Most often, we do not even give them a second thought. Thus, they actually become the only choice.

I found myself thinking about defaults in the world of four level evaluation. Here are some common defaults I see in practice. See if they are set as defaults in your practices:

1. Training needs assessments (TNAs) are provided to managers (our business partners) when they approach us with a business need that may require intervention.

2. Level 1 evaluations are reaction/smile sheets administered to participants immediately after a program.



3. Pre and post tests are synonymous with meaningful Level 2 assessments.
4. Surveys are the first (and only) choice for conducting four level evaluation.
5. The Kirkpatrick levels always start with Level 1 and move sequentially to 2, 3, and 4.
6. For all intents and purposes, evaluation ends with Level 3 because Level 4 is too far a stretch to prove.
7. ROI is the way to demonstrate ultimate value of a mission critical initiative.

These defaults have been set for years, even decades. The Kirkpatrick model, and training in general, is mired in tradition. Unfortunately much of this tradition is not serving the ultimate purpose of training - to deliver value to the business. These defaults are set not just for individuals, but for training functions, departments, and even the entire training industry.

Our industry is on trial. We need to reinvent our industry or face severe individual and industry-wide consequences. It is our strong recommendation that you check your training and development defaults. Do not let tradition, stale methodologies, or ease-of-implementation determine them for you. If one or more of these defaults has worked for you in

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the past, do not assume that they are still serving the purpose.

Here are some specific recommendations:

- Replace your TNA with a BNA (business needs analysis). Instead of predetermining that training is what is needed, broaden the questions so you can consider on-the-job interventions as part of the possible solution set.
- Vary the way you conduct Level 1 evaluation. Use learner-centered questions. Try focus groups, interviews, or video clips when piloting mission critical programs, or when your reaction sheets suggest problems. Don't forget formative (during the session) methods like pulse checks to make sure you are on track.
- Use pre and posttests only when stakeholders request data related to increase in knowledge. Use the resources you saved to enhance on-the-job monitoring and reinforcement.
- Vary your evaluation methods to best meet the needs of each initiative. Make sure you have both quantitative and qualitative evidence for important initiatives.
- Start every initiative by considering desired Level 4 results and stakeholder expectations. Ask and plan; don't "do then defend".
- Identify how every initiative contributes to the Level 4 results your organization is in existence to achieve. If you can't find the correlation, consider if your training is necessary and on track with organizational needs.

- Study the research, best practices and your own data. Look for more efficient and effective ways to gather the data you need to show that training was effective and that it contributed to employee performance and ultimate organizational results.



Keep an open mind. Most of our training defaults focus on designing and delivering effective training. A few key changes in your default system can help to convert your efforts to attaining true training effectiveness.

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Jim has co-written 3 books with his father, Don Kirkpatrick, the creator of the Kirkpatrick Four Levels. He has written two new books with his wife, Wendy: *Kirkpatrick Then and Now* (2009 Kirkpatrick Publishing) and *Training on Trial* (2010 AMACOM Books).

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