

# When to Say “No to a Training Request



By Dan Tobin, Ph.D.

In tight economic times, training budgets are often among the first items to be put on the corporate chopping block. In these circumstances, training managers are thrilled when someone comes to them with a request to develop and deliver some new training – especially if the requestor has a budget for it. But there are times when the training manager should say NO to a request.

The Kirkpatricks place great emphasis on measuring “return on expectations” – and I am in strong agreement with this approach. When should you say NO to a training request? The answer is: “When you know that your training program cannot and will not meet the requester’s expectations. Let’s look at two examples.



## When Training Won’t Solve the Problem

I was once approached by a product manager. “We have a great new set of products. Customers love them and the industry press is giving them very high ratings. But our sales reps aren’t selling them. I want you to put together a day of sales training and then deliver it to our sales reps around the world. Figure out how long it will take – the sooner the better. Let me know what you need for resources and budget and I’ll take care of it.”

After the product manager left, I made a few phone calls to some field sales reps and sales

managers I knew. They told me that they knew all about the new products and agreed that they were very good. “Then why aren’t you selling them?” I asked. Their response: “Because they don’t appear on our goal sheets. We get no credit toward our quotas and don’t earn any points toward the end-of-year sales awards by selling them. We focus on those products that will help us meet our quotas and win our awards.”

I went back to the product manager and told her what I had heard. “So, don’t waste your money on creating training that the sales reps don’t need,” I advised her.

“Then how can I get the sales reps to sell our products?” she asked me.

“Go talk with the vice president of sales. Get him to put your products on the goal sheets. And if you want to spend some money, set up some sales awards for those who sell the most of your products.”

In this case, my group could have put together the best sales training program ever seen on the new products and delivered the training around the world and it wouldn’t have made one bit of difference. **Before accepting a training request, make certain that the problem really is a training problem.**



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## When the Customer has Unrealistic Expectations for the Outcomes of Training

The company had just appointed a new vice president of engineering. I met him in the hallway a few days later. “You’re just the person I wanted to see. I need you to put together some training on leading teams for my direct reports. They know their stuff technically, but they are poor team leaders. Put together a proposal for me.” I told him I would have it to him the next day.

Having done a lot of team training throughout my career, I quickly put together a proposal for a two-day program (I knew that he would not devote more than two days to the effort). I talked with the vice president’s human resources business partner and reviewed the proposal with her. She said that she was meeting with him the next day and would present the proposal to him.

The next day, while they were meeting, I got a call from them. All of the vice president’s direct reports were going to be at headquarters the next week for a full week of meetings with him. “Your objectives are right on target. But, can you do the program in one day, rather than two?”

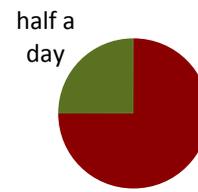


“No,” I told them. “To meet the objectives, you really need two days of training. But I could do one day of training next week, when everyone is here,

and then do a second day of training the next time you had them all here.”

“Okay,” said the vice president. “You have all day Friday for the training and we’ll schedule a second day in a month or so when they are all back here.”

I started working on the materials for the first day of training. On the next Monday afternoon, while the group was meeting, I got a call from the human resources business partner. “The agenda has gotten very full. We can only give you half a day on Friday for the training.”



I wasn’t happy about that, but I agreed to do the first half-day of the two-day program on Friday. On Thursday morning, I got another call. “We can only give you from 3 PM to 5 PM on Friday, and half the people have to leave around 4 PM to catch their flights.”

“Sorry,” I said, “but you’ll have to reschedule it for when they can devote some real time and attention to the training – preferably two full days, but I’ll settle for a full day on two different occasions.”

“You mean that you are refusing to do this?” she asked, with some shock in her voice.

“I gave you a set of objectives for the training which would meet the requirements stated by the vice president. To meet those expectations for what the group will learn, you need two days of

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training. Now you are telling me that I have one hour, during which half the people are going to be packing up their stuff and thinking about catching their flights. But the vice president will still want to meet the original objectives and he will be disappointed. If training his team leaders is a priority, he needs to devote the right amount of time to it. I've already taken what would normally be 3 to 5 days of training and compressed it into 2 days. I'm not going to go in there for an hour and disappoint everyone."



We didn't do the training that week, but held it a month later when his direct reports were back in town and were able to devote the two full days to it. It went very well and we met the expectation we had set.

**You need to make certain that the training you deliver will meet its objectives and people's expectations. Otherwise, you can do great harm to the reputation of your training group.**

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*This article is excerpted from Dan Tobin's new workshop, *On-Target Learning*, now available on CD. In the workshop, you will learn:*

- *to use Tobin's concept of a Learning Contract*
- *to tie all learning initiatives directly to your company's business goals*
- *set the right expectations for what people will learn and how they will apply it to their work*
- *to make a positive difference in individual, group and organizational business goals*
- *to meet those expectations*

[Click here to learn more about the workshop.](#)

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During his career, he has founded two corporate universities, served as vice president of program design and development at the American Management Association, written seven books on corporate learning strategies, and given keynotes and workshops on five continents.

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