

L&D's Unmodified Future: Better Sharpen Your Resume

By Jim Kirkpatrick, PhD

In 1959, my Dad, [Don Kirkpatrick](#), wrote, “Training Managers had best demonstrate the value of training before the day of reckoning arrives.” Wise foresight, to be sure. It is a concern we at Kirkpatrick Partners have voiced for years, and it seems particularly pertinent as we enter 2018.

As we discussed in our book [Training on Trial](#), many professionals in the formal areas of training, learning and development, and talent development continue to primarily cost their organizations money rather than directly and measurably contributing to their business and mission value. Where value is actually being created, few know how to demonstrate it in a way that is meaningful and compelling to the stakeholders. If this trend continues, few of these professionals will remain in their current positions in the coming years.

If you think I am being dramatic, consider the following professions that have experienced or are experiencing degrees of obsolescence: real estate agents, travel agents, restaurant order takers, will and estate attorneys, financial planners and language translators.

The main reason for this is that technology and the internet are replacing them with more accessible, less expensive options. Training, when focused on the following activities, is doomed to follow the same path:

- Spending the majority of time and resources designing, developing and delivering formal and computer-based training
- Developing and implementing competency models based on traits rather than specific behaviors
- Buying products from vendors that focus on formal training rather than follow-up
- Hosting long meetings to fine-tune training
- Using smile sheets (Level 1), knowledge testing (Level 2) and 30-60-90 day surveys (Level 3) as the only means of evaluation
- Reporting only training-related data to stakeholders

I am not opposed to all of these practices in and of themselves, but they should not be your focus. Each of them is in a precarious position of being replaced by abundant, and often free, technology.

Additionally, the language we use when talking to business leaders, program sponsors, line managers and supervisors is harming our chances of surviving the future. How often have you heard or used phrases like these:

- “We provide learning solutions”
- “We just developed a Learning Council. Would you like to attend?”
- “I am a Chief Learning Officer!”
- “We can help you close skills gaps”
- “Talent development is the wave of the future”
- “Our training programs are competency-based”
- “We pride ourselves on being a learning culture”
- “Micro-learning” is where we are putting our efforts this year”
- “... to be able to ...”

These words are foreign to business people and do little to inform, reassure or inspire them. Instead, they indicate a lack of connection to the business and scream costs, not value.

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But enough of being the grim reaper. Great opportunity sits before us. I have both high-level and tactical recommendations that, if implemented, will positively modify your futures and transform you into value-added strategic business partners.

Strategic Principles

I'd like to share a metaphor from my banking days to help conceptualize the path that lies ahead for you, if you choose to take it.

During my time as a Training Manager at First Indiana Bank, I was fortunate to have a seat at the strategic table. A frequent topic of conversation was increasing share of wallet. Simply put, it meant that we wanted each customer to have multiple accounts with us. Here is how it worked.

Let's say that Charlie has only one account with the bank, a checking account, and the bank across the street offers \$300 for anyone to move their current checking account to their bank. What will Charlie likely do? He will be gone in minutes. The bank had only one share of Charlie's wallet.

Let's now say that Marie has a checking account, a home equity loan, a car loan and a money market account, giving the bank four shares of her wallet. This makes it more difficult for Marie to move her accounts and more likely that she has numerous relationships within the bank and feels connected to it, so she will likely stay at First Indiana Bank.

Putting all of your efforts into training alone is like having only a single account at the bank. The more shares of wallet you create on the business/mission side of your organization, the more value you are adding and being acknowledged for, the more you will be seen as a strategic business partner, and the more likely it is that you will be retained and promoted.

The Torch of Truth

You can become more successful and respected if you carry the torch of truth, which shines through the darkness of training and evaluation tradition and misconceptions.

Here are some specific truths that you might consider sharing with stakeholders, business partners and your L&D colleagues:

- Formal training will not bring about significant performance improvement at Level 3 or subsequent business/mission value at Level 4.
- Evaluation needs to uncover the truth about what is and isn't working, both in the classroom and the workplace. It will require multiple methods and sources to uncover significant and meaningful truth.
- Evaluation truth is necessary to make targeted, informed improvements in the classroom and in the field.
- More effort needs to be put on the workplace, where programs and initiatives either succeed or fail at manifesting business/mission value.
- The human factor needs to balance technology in order to build bridges with business partners and bring about significant value.

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Truth is the best (and perhaps the only) way to build lasting trust with stakeholders, other business partners and training participants.

Tactical Recommendations

I have three tactical recommendations for you that can be acted upon in very specific ways.

1. Start with the end in mind

You must know what the desired end result is in order to start with the end in mind. The best way to find out is by asking your stakeholders, program sponsors, and other strategic influencers.

First, respect their time and resources by focusing on mission-critical programs only. Once you have one in mind, go to them and meet them on their turf using their language. Don't expect them to come to you and listen to training language that they don't understand or value. In your conversations, seek first to understand by asking questions about their world and actively listening. This is how you earn the right to offer recommendations.

Make sure you have agreement with them about program criteria for success, as well as the level of effort it will take to ensure significant performance and business/mission value. Get them to "sign on" to an initiative, rather than "signing off". This means actively involving them throughout the life of a program.

When developing a learning and performance plan, and tactics for continuous, truthful evaluation, begin with Kirkpatrick Level 4 and work backwards to maximize effectiveness while minimizing costs.

2. Build a strong post-training accountability and support package

Your job is not over when the formal training program comes to an end. The end of the program signals the activation of the post-training support and accountability package that you ideally will have built in advance.

Line managers and supervisors can play important post-training roles. Build bridges with them to secure their help with this, but again, be respectful of their time and resources by reserving these efforts for mission-critical programs.

These processes and systems that reinforce, monitor, encourage or reward performance of critical behaviors on the job are what we call required drivers. Develop a practical and manageable, yet powerful post-training support package that is designed to counter human nature in order to maximize the application of what was learned in training.

3. Monitor progress along the way

When you're monitoring progress, the focus should be on post-training progress in the field, not in the classroom. Try using our Kirkpatrick Blended Evaluation Plan® Form to help with this step.

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Monitor required drivers, critical on-the-job behaviors that must be performed, and early signs of success (leading indicators). This early warning detection system will allow you to uncover threats to ultimate success and fix them before final business/mission success is jeopardized.

Final thoughts

I hope this information inspires you to create an implementation plan to move from being a training provider to a strategic business partner. If you want more specific suggestions, register on our website, kirkpatrickpartners.com, to access the many free resources available there. If you want to get on the fast track, please consider registering for [our bronze](#) and [silver certification programs](#).

About the Author



Dr. Jim Kirkpatrick is the Senior Consultant for Kirkpatrick Partners, a company founded by Wendy Kirkpatrick, who serves as the President.

Jim is a thought leader in training evaluation and the creator of the [New World Kirkpatrick Model](#). Using his 15 years of experience in the corporate world, including eight years as a training manager, Jim trains and consults for corporate, government, military and humanitarian organizations around the world. He is passionate about assisting learning professionals in redefining themselves as strategic business partners to become a viable force in the workplace.

Jim has co-written four books with Wendy Kirkpatrick, including [Kirkpatrick's Four Levels of Training Evaluation](#). They also served as the subject matter experts for the United States Office of Personnel Management's *Training Evaluation Field Guide: Demonstrating the Value of Training at Every Level*.

Read more about Kirkpatrick Partners at kirkpatrickpartners.com.