



## Is It Coaching or Training?

Recently, Learning Dynamics was asked to help a client prepare a supervisor for the next level of management. Overall, the supervisor had a good solid record of performance and a well-developed reputation for getting the job done no matter what it was. She was considered a reliable performer, and senior management felt that she was ready for the next rung on the hierarchical ladder.

In the evaluation discussion of this supervisor, one or two aspects of her performance were identified that would not serve her well at the next level. They decided to employ a 360-degree assessment which included her supervisor, her peers, her direct reports and herself. The results of the 360-assessment validated the concerns that senior leadership had identified prior to the assessment.

So, the client contacted Learning Dynamics to provide “training” to this individual to strengthen the worry spots in her current performance. They felt she needed to address these areas before she would be considered for promotion.

Through discussion with the client’s senior team and through the results of the supervisor’s 360-assessment, especially her self-evaluation, Learning Dynamics determined that she needed coaching, not training.

Let’s take a look at each of these approaches to see how and why Learning Dynamics arrived at the conclusion that coaching would serve the supervisor better than training. It was acknowledged that there might be some training embedded within the coaching content, but the primary need was better served with coaching as the best approach.

### What’s Training for Anyway?

Generally, training is used to add new information, introduce new behavior, new procedures, or to adhere to a change in the overall game plan. It is designed to fill a void, prepare the trainee for compliance, and strengthen performance.

Typically, the training sessions consist of transferring a set of objectives from the trainer to the trainee. The content does not belong to the trainee as much as it does to the trainer. When the training is successful, a transfer has taken place and the training content now resides within the trainee. Most commonly, the trainee has little to say about the lessons he/she is expected to absorb. While the rationale for why the new information is needed may be presented in the training sessions, generally that rationale is not negotiable by the trainee.

Not long ago, during training on managing change delivered to a bank’s supervisors, one of the participants was very distressed at having to attend the training. His message was delivered loud and clear: *“Why are we doing this training? Is the bank being purchased? Are we merging with another bank? Have we been cited for banking violations?”*

We explained to this young man that the training was not specifically targeting imminent changes for the bank, but dealt with the rapid changes in banking itself, like universal banking or remote digital banking. It was clear that this explanation did not satisfy the attendee and, in fact, he never returned after the mid-morning break.

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Until this man could see the actual void the training was to fill, he felt like he could not participate. After the fact, the bank's training people realized that the rationale for offering the change management training had not been adequately communicated, at least to that one individual.

### **So when do we coach and when do we train?**

Coaching is very different from training. In the example of the female supervisor being "groomed" for the next level, what was needed was one-on-one coaching. While training is accepting the addition of information that was previously external to the participant, coaching focuses on that which is internal within the coachee. In the case cited, the supervisor's self-assessment was consistent with that of her other respondents. She was fully aware of her need to develop in the same areas that others saw. She didn't need new information. She needed an introspective exploration of her own performance to identify ways to strengthen those areas needing development.

Working with her coach, her first task was to identify a set of objectives for her own development. While her coach might make a suggestion or two, she remained the architect of her own development.

Once her objectives were set her coach asked her "OK, how are you going to go about this?" This is clearly a very different approach than traditional training. As the coachee begins to identify a plan for development, her coach might, in fact, offer her training on techniques she did not know yet. But the goal is the completion of her game plan and the achievement of her own objectives, with training provided only as a means to that end.

Our success in the realm of coaching is very well established and continues to be an important part of our contribution to the success of our clients. The combination of effective training with focused one-on-one coaching has been a winning strategy. Typically, the results surpass the expectations of the participants and their leaders.

