

Press Release

For Immediate Release

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Maidenhead, UK

Action plans – what a struggle!

As the saying goes, ‘plans are nothing. Planning is everything’.

At the end of any training event, have you agonised over how to get people to put together a decent action plan?

We all know the depressing statistics that reveal the transfer of learning from a course back to work to be the Achilles heel in the whole process. Inevitably, there are many reasons for the fade-out - not least the widespread lack of encouragement most people encounter on their return to work. In a perfect world, learning would be a priority in every working environment and the difficulties of transferring learning would disappear at a stroke.

In the meantime we are left with an imperfect world where learning and working are not integrated or, even worse, are in actual conflict with each other. Not surprisingly, most action plans are essential if people are to be adequately equipped for the perilous challenge of transferring learning back to work.

Peter Honey; founder of Peter Honey Publications Ltd says “I see action plans as the equivalent of those tiles on a space shuttle that absorb heat and prevent it burning up as it re-enters the earth's atmosphere. We need to send learners back to work heavily protected so that they survive re-entry to the working atmosphere. In addition to heat absorbing tiles, I recommend helmets, bullet proof vests, armour plating, steel capped shoes and protective goggles (preferably rose-tinted so that things look better than they really are)”.

The irony is that, despite our best efforts to encourage people to produce action plans, we so often encounter resistance from the very people we are at pains to protect. The resistance is caused by a number of factors amongst them being:

1) The tendency for action planning to happen at the end of a course where psychologically people have already left and/or where the chief concern is to plan their escape route (I have literally found people pouring over road maps when they were supposed to be planning something far more significant than their journey home).

2) The tedious business of converting lessons learned and/or laudable intentions into specific plans that are truly achievable so that people can 'hit the road running'. The need for specificity is a drag and seems too many people, distastefully pedantic.

3) The tendency for people to be lulled into a false sense of security. The esprit de corps generated by the dynamics of the course, the feeling that enthusiasm alone will suffice, combine to dull the memories of problems back at work. People therefore become blasé about the need for protection. Just like someone who puts caution aside and fails to insist on a condom.

In addition, there is a deeper resistance to the whole business of planning. Many people regard it as a futile activity because experience has taught them that plans can rarely be implemented without modification, sometimes substantial modification. The erroneous conclusion they therefore reach, is that it isn't worth planning the first place. A sounder conclusion would be that it is worth planning in order to have something to modify!

Peter's recipe for helping people to produce sufficiently robust action plans has evolved over a long period and is currently this:

1. Always get people to list their most significant/important lessons learned before action planning. It is preferable that their learning list has been built up over the length of the course rather than compiled in one go at the end.
2. Always give people a checklist of questions to work through that focuses their attention on the working situation they are about to return to. Typically I ask twelve questions including ones about how frantic and disjointed their work tends to be, the extent of time pressures, the extent to which they are 'empowered', whether their current boss tends to be supportive or not, whether they have helpful colleagues and so on. These questions don't solve anything; they just invite a realistic appraisal of the working situation.
3. Always give people guidance on the criteria for robust action plans with a worked up example. The advice is the usual stuff about plans needing to cover the what's, whys, when's, where's, how's and measures.

Also plans should meet the L-E-A-R-N criteria.

Limited

Exact

Appropriate

Realistic

Now

4. Always get people to co-counsel, co-coach, co-mentor each other's action plans.
5. Always get people to share at least one action plan with the whole group. This increases commitment since it seems silly to go public about a plan and then not do it (Weight Watchers use the same technique to make it more likely people will stick to their plans and achieve their targets).

Ultimately, however, it is as Eisenhower said; 'plans are nothing. Planning is everything'.

Planning is vital if objectives are to be achieved. Plans provide a route map with milestones along the way showing what has to be accomplished, in what sequence and by when.

In a perfect world, everything would go according to plan with no deviations or hitches. In reality plans are in a constant state of flux as circumstances change, deadlines slip and people fail to keep their promises. You need a plan in order to have something to adapt and modify rather than in order to have something to cling rigidly to, come what may. Plans are organic, not static; they demand constant attention all the way on the journey from the origination of the objective to its eventual accomplishment.

Developing plans and implementing them is rarely something you can, or should, do in isolation. Other people will have their part to play and the plan will probably affect many people who may not be directly involved. This means that people will have to be consulted, briefed, chased and supported throughout the life of the plan.

All this makes planning a challenging activity with many surprises, twists and turns along the way. The Planning module is part of the Behaviour Series Questionnaires by Peter Honey Publications. This module will help you to develop robust, yet flexible, plans. Involve other people in your plans in a way that taps into their expertise and wins their support. Implement your plans successfully. For further information on the extensive range of questionnaires and booklets by Peter Honey Publications, please visit www.peterhoney.com

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Company Profile:

Peter Honey Publications Ltd was founded by Dr Peter Honey – a leading guru on learning and behaviour and their impact on peoples' performance in the work place. He is a prolific author, consultant and speaker.

The company publishes a range of resources to help individuals, teams and organisations make learning a priority. Products include online self-assessment questionnaires, booklets for learners and manuals for trainers. The best known product is the Honey and Mumford "Learning Styles Questionnaire" which was first published in 1982.

All the products are used globally with core markets in the UK, US, Australia and Europe. Customers include Blue Chip Companies, Local Councils, Universities, over 100 NHS Trusts and many training consultants and executive coaches as well as individual learners and students.

Our mission at Peter Honey Publications is to create success through learning. Learning, the most important of all human capabilities, will never become obsolete. Continuous learning is the key to sustained innovation and competitiveness.

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