TRAINING REINFORCEMENT

The 7 Principles to Create Measurable Behavior Change and Make Learning Stick

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Corporations spend billions of dollars every year on employee training. These investments are meant to increase productivity, improve communication, and boost the bottom line, but often managers and executives feel as if they’ve thrown away their training dollars. Nothing changes.

The problem with corporate training is that when the learners get back to their work, they forget what they’ve been taught, and/or they’re too busy to apply what they just learned. The training investment is wasted.

My brother, Kees, and I (Anthonie) wrote this book because we’ve seen this happen too many times. [Editor’s note: Although Kees and Anthonie wrote this book together, “I” refers to Anthonie throughout the book.]

We are former top athletes who competed at the highest Judo level in the world. We spent many hours every day for many years becoming the best in our sport. We know how to train, and we know how to make training principles stick.

After my Judo career with experience as an Olympic athlete in 1992 in Barcelona, I was a corporate business trainer for knowledge and soft skills for more than ten years. When I compared how training was applied in the sports world versus the corporate world, I noticed a big difference. Training was given, but it was never followed up with reinforcement.

The combination of training and reinforcement is what transformed Kees and me from kids who liked to be physical into Judo champions. Without training reinforcement from our coach, we would never have made it to that level.

Solutions offered in the learning industry are good at regurgitating lessons and reminding learners of what they’ve been taught, but they don’t reinforce lessons, which is required to create lasting behavior.

In this book, we describe an effective methodology that has proven its success in the last 12 years. We want to educate the learning industry and inspire every learning professional to see that reinforcement is much more than just sending reminders or a focus on knowledge retention.

By using this book, learning professionals can create a solid reinforcement program. The methodology used in *The 7 Principles of Reinforcement* is perfectly
balanced between engagement and results. Using the seven principles we 
describe, you can develop a program that reinforces learning and drives your 
talent and organizational strategies forward. Then you can be assured that the 
knowledge and skills your learners have been trained in are put into practice 
and that you are spending your training dollars well.

By applying The 7 Principles of Reinforcement, you drive training results 
and increase learners’ engagement. A strong reinforcement program with a 
focus on results, but with no participation, does not create lasting behavior 
change or impact in your organization. But high engagement does not always 
guarantee good outcomes. Only the perfect balance between a strong founda-
tion with measurable results and a focus on engagement guarantees the transfer 
of training from learning into application.

We have divided the book into four parts, and throughout the book we use 
a lot of examples from our sports careers to explain the seven principles and the 
methodology.

Part 1 explains how you can achieve behavior change by using reinforce-
ment. We explain what reinforcement is, what is needed for behavior change, 
the difference between training goals and reinforcement objectives, and what 
influences behavior change.

In Part 2, we provide an overview of The 7 Principles of Reinforcement, 
and then explain how the first three principles are used to build a strong foun-
dation to drive results. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 contains tools and assessments to 
help you to build and improve your foundation.

Part 3 helps you build your engagement to increase learners’ participa-
tion. In Chapters 10, 11, and 12 we explain the three principles that help you 
create messages that will reinforce the training and keep your learners’ minds 
engaged. Again, each chapter provides tools and assessments.

To analyze your reinforcement program, you will find a more detailed look 
at the methodology in Part 4. A methodology based on your specific reinforce-
ment lever helps you determine when improvement is needed. Chapter 16 sug-
gests ways to check and improve your reinforcement messages. The S.A.F.E. 
methodology is based on 12 years of analyzing reinforcement messages and 
determining their impact.

Chapter 17 explains the different approaches by training type. Chapter 18 
provides you the best practices on how to introduce training reinforcement 
programs in your organization and explains the role facilitators have in a suc-
cessful reinforcement program. In Chapter 19 we describe the final recommo-
dations to become a reinforcement expert.
The Appendix contains all the tools you need to build an effective reinforcement program. Also make sure to visit www.the7principlesofreinforcement.com, where you will find digital versions of all the assessments, tests, and action plans, along with reporting options. You can also download additional reinforcement programs based on this book.
Chapter 5

An Overview of the 7 Principles of Reinforcement

The 7 Principles of Reinforcement will help you to create a successful reinforcement program and a well-balanced series of messages. There is a strong cohesion among all of the principles. Some drive results by creating a strong foundation for your reinforcement program; others drive participation by focusing on engagement. Both results and participation are essential to making your reinforcement program successful.

This chapter explains how each principle influences a reinforcement program. Before you focus on the cohesion, let me list the principles:

1. Master The 3 Phases of Behavior Change.
2. Close The 5 Reinforcement Gaps.
3. Create Measurable Behavior Change.
4. Provide the Perfect Push and Pull.
5. Create Friction and Direction.
6. Follow the Reinforcement Flow.
7. Place the Learner in the Center.

Principle 1: Master The 3 Phases of Behavior Change

If you want to change behaviors effectively, you cannot skip any of The 3 Phases of Behavior Change:

1. **Awareness**: Learners must understand *why* the behavior change is important to them.
2. **Knowledge/Skills**: Learners must know *how* to master their new knowledge and skills.
3. **Apply**: Learners must focus on how to *apply* your training back on the job. In this final phase, learners should focus on using their newly mastered knowledge and skills in their daily work.

I cover these phases in more detail in Chapter 6.

**PRINCIPLE 2: CLOSE THE 5 REINFORCEMENT GAPS**

It is easy to determine the knowledge and skills your learners need for specific behaviors that will create business impact. However, to apply the new knowledge and skills, you need more. How is the environment to practice, to reflect, or know the options to fail? Think about my stay in Mátraháza in northern Hungary, with no luxury, no diversion, and no acquaintances. It was the perfect environment for me to learn.

What do you need to explain about workplace procedures? For example, perhaps you are a leader and the procedures for evaluating your direct reports are not clear. What will the results of the evaluations be? What will be the impact of your team evaluation? Even if your evaluation skills are fantastic, if your direct reports don’t understand part of the process, they will not incorporate your feedback as well as they could.

If you want to change behavior that creates business impact, you must focus on all five gaps during your reinforcement program.

- **Knowledge**: Are the information and new knowledge sufficient?
- **Skill**: Do your learners know how to implement and apply their new knowledge?
- **Motivation**: Are learners motivated by internal or external forces to achieve the desired change?
- **Environment**: Do your learners have enough support and time to be successful?
- **Communication**: Do your learners receive enough directions, procedures, process, and other communication from you?

**PRINCIPLE 3: CREATE MEASURABLE BEHAVIOR CHANGE**

If you want to create measurable behavior change, you need a measurement plan. During my Olympic career, all sorts of measurements were taken of my body and of my performance. None of these measurements felt like assessment tools.
To create a foundation for your program, determine your objectives, which will determine the metrics you measure. Reinforcement starts with building on learning goals to determine the objectives. With reinforcement, the focus shifts away from knowing how to do something toward a more sophisticated model of evaluation, application, and mastery.

When you craft your measurement plan, think about the desired impact you want to see in your organization. Avoid measuring on a “happy sheet” level: “How was the training?” “How well did the trainer do?” “How did you like the workbook?”

When you design a measurement plan, consider how and when you will communicate results to the learners. Avoid building an assessment tool that only has value for the organization and not the learners.

**PRINCIPLE 4: PROVIDE THE PERFECT PUSH AND PULL**

If you want to maximize retention and drive behavior change among learners, you must provide the perfect balance between push and pull. It’s not the action that drives the impact—it’s the combination of action and reaction.

To deliver impactful reinforcement, think about the message you want to send and how to create the most impact for the learners. Also think about what the learners need to respond to you.

**PRINCIPLE 5: CREATE FRICTION AND DIRECTION**

To increase the impact of your reinforcement program, the brain needs to work. Lazy brains create lazy performance. You know how the brains works from Chapter 2, so you can optimize the effect for better results. In your reinforcement program, you need to find the balance between friction and direction, as my coach did with the big ax in his trunk.

You don’t want to lose the learners because of too much friction, but also, you don’t want to lose the learners because of too much direction or with a program that is too predictable. You want to find the balance between those worlds. When your learners’ brains must work to master your content or complete a puzzle, or figure out the structure or connections, your content will stick much longer.

**PRINCIPLE 6: FOLLOW THE REINFORCEMENT FLOW**

when a challenge far exceeds a learner’s ability, it is probably too difficult and will frustrate the learner. On the other hand, when something is far too easy for the learners, they are not stimulated or engaged and the training is boring.

Most training experiences involve overwhelming the learners with a lot of new information. This leaves learners feeling exhausted. For your reinforcement program to be effective, check the program’s structure and ensure that it follows the reinforcement flow.

Is your reinforcement program becoming more difficult to keep your learners in the flow, or is it just a reminder service? Keep a consistent balance between challenge and satisfaction to encourage engagement, retention, and adoption among your learners.

When Kees became Dutch champion, he was in the flow. All elements fit together. Ask any athlete who has won a medal and he or she will tell you the same thing: “I was in the flow.”

**Principle 7: Place the Learner in the Center**

Reinforcement is intended to make a difference in performance, educate learners on how to do their jobs better, and promote the success and growth of learners. Many organization focus on quizzing the learners, but keep in mind that a reinforcement program is not an assessment tool. Instead, focus on reinforcing and measuring the information that is most valuable to the learner.

Everything my coach, training team, and I did during my Olympic journey was focused on me. Everything—and I mean everything—was meant to help me perform as well as possible. No exceptions.

Sometimes it was hard for my staff to put my needs before theirs. My coach fired my physiotherapist because he wouldn’t put me ahead of everything else. He was an independent therapist with his own company and clients. When I had a tournament, or came back from a training camp with an injury, my coach did not want to wait for the physiotherapist to see me the next day; he insisted on immediate treatment, even at 9 p.m. on a Sunday. The physiotherapist was not willing to make these sacrifices to his weekend. Although the therapist was good and understood Judo and its injuries, my coach decided to select another specialist who understood the principle of placing the learner first.
THE COHESION OF THE 7 PRINCIPLES OF REINFORCEMENT

To build an effective reinforcement program, your focus must be on results and participation. You cannot separate them. If you don’t have any participation, your learners drop off after one week, and you won’t get results. And if your program is not focused on results, you don’t get much participation. Learners don’t want to spend time on your program if they think they won’t see any results. It’s as simple as that. Even as a young sports person, I needed results; I needed to win some medals to stay engaged and motivated to train hard every week.

Supporting Results and Participation

Each of the seven principles supports results or participation. Three principles are needed to build a strong foundation to focus on results:

1. Master The 3 Phases of Behavior Change.
2. Close The 5 Reinforcement Gaps.
3. Create Measurable Behavior Change.

If your training foundation addresses the phases of behavior change, shores up the gaps that can lead to shortcomings, and identifies the correct measurements to analyze, it is built perfectly to gain results.

However, results require participation. The next three principles are more focused on engagement, which drives participation:

4. Provide the Perfect Push and Pull.
5. Create Friction and Direction.
6. Follow the Reinforcement Flow.

These principles help you stay focused on the engagement. Balance the actions and requested reactions from your learners, stimulate their thinking process without losing them, and make your reinforcement program more difficult over time.

But you are missing one principle:

7. Place the Learner in the Center.

Figure 5.1 depicts the relationships among The 7 Principles in terms of engagement, results, and participation. A bar, titled “7. Participant in the
Center,” runs diagonally from the lower left to the upper right, across the first six principles. This bar is the Reinforcement Lever, which shows you exactly how well you do on the other six principles. If one principle is not used correctly, the lever will change position.

The three principles below the Reinforcement Lever build your foundation. As you know, a good foundation creates results. The three principles above the Reinforcement Lever drive your engagement. The better you fulfill each principle, the higher the results and your engagement will be.

Throughout the rest of the book, I help you fulfill each principle and show you what happens to the Reinforcement Lever if you fail. The useful assessments will help you to build a strong reinforcement program with great results and a high percentage of participation.

**The Formula for Behavior Change**

Before you learn about your foundation and engagement and the shape of your reinforcement level, I want to address the connection between those two. Do you know the formula for being effective? Effectiveness = Quality × Acceptance ($E = Q \times A$).

I have seen this formula used in many consultancy companies that help their clients in all kind of change programs. If the quality of your message is
perfect, but there is no acceptance, the effect is nil. As you know from math class, anything multiplied by zero equals zero.

If you want to be effective, you have to focus on quality and acceptance. The same goes for your reinforcement program. The quality is in your foundation, and the acceptance is in the engagement. Behavior Change = Foundation × Engagement:

\[
BC = F \times E
\]

If the quality of your foundation is 0, you won’t achieve behavior change. If the engagement is poor or even 0, you won’t get your desired behavior change.

Let’s do some calculations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foundation</th>
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<th>Behavior Change</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>84</td>
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What does this overview teach you? Put your brain to work. Here’s a hint: The behavior change is proportional to the improvements in your foundation and the engagement of your learners. Compare your conclusion with my findings over the last 12 years of developing reinforcement programs.

1. Never forget to pay attention to the foundation or engagement. Don’t create a “0.”

2. If your program is mediocre (the score is lower than 25) and you improve both your foundation and engagement, the behavior change will be enormous, more than three times as high (score 84).

3. Improve your foundation and engagement simultaneously. It’s easier to create small improvements in both areas than a huge improvement in one area. The effect on the behavior change is almost the same: \(6 \times 6 = 36\), compared with \(8 \times 5 = 40\).

You will learn the details of how to use The 7 Principles in the following chapters. Each principle has its own principle assessment. When you use the
assessment, you can see how you score and whether you need to improve. Each assessment shows an outcome that describes the suggested actions:

- Needs improvement.
- Needs attention.
- Good to go.

I offer you an assessment for each principle because this allows you to improve your reinforcement program with small and specific steps. When you combine the results from all of the assessments, you will have good insight about how well the foundation is focused on results and how engaged and willing to participate your learners are.
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