

The Real World of Training . . . What is Wrong Here?

Case 1

Mechanics from dealerships across the country attended a three-day training session put on by the manufacturer. The cost of the training, including travel and lodging, was split between the manufacturer and the dealerships. The focus of the training was on the electrical systems in three lines of automobiles. Given the number of trainees, it would have been too expensive to provide three automobiles for each mechanic to work on and it would be nearly impossible to find a facility large enough to do so. So the training was designed for the instructor to give instruction on the various systems and then to pose various problems that might occur. The trainees would then try to identify the symptoms that would result. For example, the problem might be given as “The car has a burned-out capacitor.” The trainees would then try to identify the symptoms that would appear (e.g., High current surge demands on the vehicle’s electrical systems can damage the electrical system, including the battery, alternator, and voltage regulator). The training covered a wide range of electrical problems and the mechanics rated the program highly as they left. When doing a follow-up evaluation, the training director was disappointed to learn that the dealerships reported that their mechanics showed no improvement in troubleshooting electrical problems.

Case 2

You are the training director for a training program designed to prepare people to become certified as program managers. The training is divided into five sections. Each section consists of two days of training for each of four weeks. Each section has a different trainer who is an expert in the content of that section. At the end of each week, the trainees take a test to measure what they have learned. You’ve just reviewed the results of the last four cohorts to have completed the training. You are surprised to notice that the trainees did poorly on the first exam but then did considerably better on the second and third exams. Then the trainees did poorly on the fourth, but improved on the fifth and sixth. This trend continued throughout the 20 weeks, even for the brightest trainees. You ask yourself “What is going on here?”