Hidden Obstacles to Outstanding Performance

Topics:

- Experience five hidden obstacles to outstanding performance
- Examine where employees face these obstacles at work
- Develop solutions to help employees overcome these obstacles

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Obstacle #1: <u>Conflicting Goals</u>

Employees often face a perceived conflict between various goals that are set for them. An example is celebrating training completions rather than the achievement of a business goal.

Trainers aren't alone. in a [2009 T&D article](#), Jack and Patti Phillips revealed a huge disconnect between what CEOs say they wanted from training (results) and what they were actually measuring (participation, cost, and post-training satisfaction).

Solutions:
Gain clarity and agreement on the goals for any training initiative, and ensure those goals are measured and reported.

Imagine how this would translate to the "meet three people in three minutes" exercise. If we had formed small groups of 4-5 people, and each person quickly shared their information while others took notes, we would achieve the goal with time to spare.

Obstacle #2: <u>Multitasking</u>

Multitasking causes employees to work slower and make more errors. This can seem counterintuitive, because we feel really busy whenever we multitask.

You can prove it with a couple of exercises:
- The exercise we did is called a [Stroop test](#).
- Here's a different one from [Dave Crenshaw](#).

Even worse? [Multitasking is addictive](#).

Solutions:
It's hard to eliminate multitasking entirely, though you can reduce the impact. Here are a few solutions:

- Promote awareness of the negative impact of multitasking.
- Try the [Pomodoro Technique](#). (Note: I only follow steps 1-3.)
- Keep all messaging programs (email, chat, Facebook, etc.) closed unless you are using them.

This last one is counterintuitive: **practice boredom**. The next time you are waiting in line at Starbucks or a similar place, resist the urge to pull out your phone. Spend your time observing the world around you. You'll likely notice things you've never seen before and find your mind becoming a bit clearer in the process.

Obstacle #3: <u>Framing</u>

We tend to see things from a certain perspective, but that may not be the whole picture. The nine dot puzzle illustrates this challenge.

A typical example is a request for training. For instance, in this short video, a training sponsor requests a two hour interviewing skills workshop for her supervisors because the company is rolling out a new interviewing process. A frame is immediately established that the sponsor will be happy with a two hour class. (Later on in the story, it's revealed the **real issue** is high turnover due to poor hiring decisions.)

Solutions:

Trainers should observe people doing the work to be trained whenever possible. Don't rely on surveys or your own intuition. Watching employees work often reveals hidden obstacles or new perspectives that you would not otherwise notice.

For example, I was once asked to conduct time management training for a payroll department. After spending time observing the team doing their work, we discovered the biggest problem was an inefficient workflow. Training alone never would have solved the issue if we hadn't adjusted procedures.

Obstacle #4: <u>Enthusiasm vs Commitment</u>

I live near Lake Murray, which has a beautiful 3.2 mile path for walkers, joggers, and bicyclists. Every January, this path is teaming with people who are enthusiastically pursuing a New Year's resolution to get in shape.

Most of those people are gone by February. The few people who continue to exercise throughout the year are the ones who are truly **committed**.

We need to make that distinction in training. Awarding certificates of completion at the end of a two-day workshop is **enthusiasm**. Celebrating success when learners apply new skills and achieve better results at work is **commitment**.

Solutions:

Think beyond the content you create and focus on helping learners achieve sustainable results.

- Apply the 70-20-10 rule to your training design.
- Create stronger learning objectives with the A-B-C-D model.
- Build training around achieving performance objectives.

For example, I once redesigned a management training program so people didn't "graduate" until they had completed a series of tasks on the job. Their boss, not the training department, had to certify the new manager could do the work.

Obstacle #5: <u>Social Pressure</u>

The actions of the people around us create enormous social pressure to conform.

We're sometimes conscious of this. Watch [this short video](#) to see an example from conformity experiments conducted by Solomon Asch.

At other times, we're unaware that we're conforming to the group. Muzafer Sherif [conducted an experiment](#) where groups of people quickly calibrated their perception of how far a light was moving, without realizing they were being influenced.

Here's a training example. An HR leader rolled out a new safety program after her company failed an OSHA audit and faced potential fines. She declared that anyone who did not follow the new accident procedure would be fired.

A month later, the HR leader sustained a minor injury in the office. She refused to follow the accident reporting procedure, and even laughed it off in front of her staff. The message was now clear that the safety program was more bluster than substance.

Solutions:
Positive social pressure can get people to do the right thing.

- Always act as a role model for the programs you train.
- Recognize people who achieve success through training.
- Enlist key influencers (executives, respected employees, etc.) to socialize new initiatives.

About Jeff Toister, CPLP

Jeff Toister has written three books, including the best-selling *The Service Culture Handbook*, and contributed to the ASTD Handbook, 2nd edition. Jeff has also authored multiple training videos on LinkedIn Learning (a.k.a. Lynda.com) including H*ow to Design and Deliver Training Programs*, *Measuring Learning Effectiveness*, and *Instructional Design Essentials: Needs Analysis*.

In 2006, Jeff became one of the first people to earn Certified Professional in Learning & Performance (CPLP) credential from the Association for Talent Development (ATD). In 2015, he received ATD's CPLP Contributor Award for outstanding contributions to the credential. He is a Past President of ATD's San Diego chapter where he is a recipient of the WillaMae M. Heitman award for distinguished service.