HOW TO...

DESIGN SELF-DIRECTED TRAINING

Self-directed learning can form a very valuable part of a blended learning programme. Not everything has to be done face to face, and self-directed learning doesn't have to be e-learning. It can be old-fashioned workbooks or activity cards. It's especially useful for areas like induction or technical subjects. Self-directed training encourages people to take responsibility for their own development, involves a range of people and recognises that the business can't always stop to accommodate someone's training needs.

Self-directed learning is NOT unsupported learning. It is important to get the balance right between providing challenge and support. With self-directed learning you cannot rely on a professional trainer to hold everything together, so getting the design right is even more crucial than with more traditional workshops. So here are my top tips for designing self-directed learning.

1. **Do your research** - Self-directed learning should make use of all the resources that are already available within the business rather than creating new ones. When designing the learning, you must find out exactly what information is available, in what format and where it is. You also need to identify if anything is out of date or if anything is missing. You will need to address this during the design phase.

2. **Have clear, simple outcomes** - The whole point of self-directed learning is that it can be completed in bite-size chunks. Breaking the learning down into small specific objectives is key. You then need to think about how each of those objectives could be achieved and how the learner would know when they had finished. Also include approximate timings for each activity. This will allow learners to fit their learning around their other commitments.

3. **Specify what is needed** - At the start of every activity, outline exactly what the learner will need to complete the activity and where they will find it. This may be specific pages on an intranet, a copy of the booklet or time with a specialist. It is up to the learner to obtain their own resources, although they should be advised how best to do this.

4. **Provide step-by-step guidelines** - Almost like a recipe, provide step-by-step guidelines that will take the learner through all of the actions needed to meet the objective. Don't worry if this seems a little simplistic – it is better to provide too much information than to leave the learner feeling lost and unsupported.

5. **Provide ways of measuring completion** - When I write self-directed learning programs, each activity will have a set of questions that must be answered, or activities that need to be checked by someone with more knowledge or authority. It is important to make sure that learners are learning the right things and have the opportunity to discuss their learning with a manager or expert within their field.