

HOW TO...

DESIGN TRAINING FOR MORE SENIOR ROLES

Many management development programmes that I design are reasonably standard in terms of their format: a little pre-course work, a workshop, some follow-up work and then repeat – each module building on the last. Generally, managers who attend these programmes are junior-mid level with less than 5 years' experience in a management role. This approach tends to work well.

But what about training for a more senior level? Those who have already done the typical management development programme? It is possible to argue that training isn't always the best option for this group: development through coaching and mentoring is often used instead. However, sometimes companies want a more formal programme. This is quite a challenging programme to design as everyone joining the programme has quite a different role. They also have different (and quite often extensive) experience, different knowledge and different skills.

There's no magic wand to wave that will ensure you get the design of this right. It really must be as unique as the people completing it. However, here are some general principles that will help you get it right.

1. **Do your research** - Research the subjects to be covered, the roles of the delegates, their politics and environment. At this level, having a little knowledge of a lot of things is not good enough. If possible speak to the participants who will be attending the training to find out what issues are affecting them.
2. **Take a blended approach** - People at this level are more likely to complete learning in their own time, so take as much of the 'knowledge' out and deliver it in advance by other means. No-one will appreciate a trainer 'teaching' theory.
3. **Have broader objectives** - Delegates may have very different roles so you can't create behavioural objectives in the way you can for front-line staff or team leaders. You can still be quite clear, for example, "Identify 3 ways to build better working relationships" but HOW they will do that should be left to them.
4. **Don't be too prescriptive** - Training programmes for this level of delegate has to be flexible. Unlike programmes traditionally run for frontline staff or first-line supervisors, training at this level will only be run once or twice so you really have to tailor it to the audience, whilst delivering against the objectives. Build in lots of options and make it okay for the trainer to go "off piste" if the group requires it.
5. **Make sure the training is immediately relevant** - Time is money and at this level, participants will not want to spend hours doing something that they cannot see the immediate benefit of. This doesn't mean that training can't be fun. People learn when they are having fun, but all activities must be relevant to the content.

6. **Address real-life issues** - General case studies and theoretical situations are not going to add value to people at this level. Get them engaged with the programme from the outset and ask them to bring real-life scenarios and issues to deal with (if you cannot obtain them during research). It goes without saying that confidentiality must be respected.
7. **Use the experience in the room** - The trainer will be just one of the experts who can provide advice and suggestions to help people improve their performance. A much more facilitative approach is required, so timings have to be approximate and methods have to be suggestions. When designing training at this level, posing questions and suggestions in the trainer's guide for certain sections of the program may be sufficient.