

Did the Training Work? An Evaluation of a Retail Training Program

By Erica L. Smith, Jodene Gilman, Ronda Harris, Corinna Provant-Robishaw, & Scott Rooke

Tales from the Field, a monthly column, consists of reports of evidence-based performance improvement practice and advice, presented by graduate students, alumni, and faculty of Boise State University's Instructional and Performance Technology department.

A New Cashier Training Program Implemented at a Retailer Company

Northern Tool + Equipment, a U.S.-based retailer specializing in power tools and equipment for contractors and weekend warriors, operates over 60 retail locations across the country. In light of the current tough economy being faced across the industry, the company decided to slow its growth of retail stores and to focus more heavily on creating consistency between stores and optimizing the retail staff.

In March 2008, the company implemented its first standard cashier training program with several goals in mind - to ensure consistency in cashier training across all retail stores, to set new cashiers up for success, and to reduce cashier turnover. The three-day training program became a requirement for all newly hired full-time and part-time cashiers. Within six months since the inception of the training program, 87 newly-hired cashiers were provided the training through each store's designated cashier trainer.

An Evaluation of the Training Program

In September 2008, the company wanted to evaluate whether the Cashier Training Program was meeting the predetermined goals and to find areas of improvement. The company also wanted to understand the program's strengths and weaknesses before developing standard training programs for other retail store positions. The authors of this article were the team of evaluators who conducted the evaluation as a semester-long class project in Professor Chyung's Evaluation Methodology class at Boise State University.

The evaluation team used Michael Scriven's consumer-oriented approach as a framework of this evaluation project (Davidson, 2005; Scriven, 2007), because it would allow the team to incorporate the stakeholders' needs into the evaluation design, instead of focusing only on measuring success of the training program against the predetermined goals. The evaluation team, working with stakeholders, identified six dimensions as key indicators of a successful cashier training program (see Table 1). The evaluation team and stakeholders also worked together to develop a method to determine the value of the training program (i.e., how good is good) by creating a rubric for each dimension. The data collection methods the team used were a record review to measure the Program Costs and Turnover dimensions and a survey of cashiers who completed the training program to measure the other four key dimensions.

Table 1. Key Dimensions for the Cashier Training Program Evaluation

Key Dimension	Definition
1. Curriculum Accuracy	The curriculum accurately covers all aspects of the cashier's job.
2. Program Consistency	The program is implemented consistently between stores.
3. Learning Environment	The manager and cashier training create a welcoming and positive environment for the new hire.
4. Cashier Confidence	The cashier is confident in his or her job after completing the training.
5. Program Cost	Program costs are minimal.
6. Decreased Turnover	Cashier turnover decreases as a result of the training.

Evaluation Results and Recommendations

Based on the results of the data analysis, the evaluation team concluded that the training program was excellent in all six dimensions. Analysis of survey results revealed that cashiers were more confident in completing tasks after the training program, had positive interactions with their trainers and managers during the process, and felt that the training program supported their needs to be successful as cashiers. Based on these results, the evaluation team expects that the existing program would continue to produce capable cashiers as long as individual store managers continue to support the training program and ensure its consistency and positive learning environment.

The evaluation team made a number of project recommendations to the client, Northern Tool + Equipment, including the following:

- The low-cost design and implementation of the training program were found to be effective in teaching new cashiers. This led to the recommendation that these same strategies should be used with other retail training programs going forward.
- The cash register practice transactions were the least utilized part of the training program. Increasing the amount of practice transactions during the training program was noted to be top priority.
- There were three training topics with lower confidence ratings than the rest of the other 20 topics. This was noted as an area needing follow up.
- The evaluation team discovered several areas lacking easy access to data necessary for comprehensive evaluation. It was recommended that appropriate data be tracked for the Cashier Training Program and that it be made readily accessible for periodic evaluations of the program's status.

References

- Davidson, E. J. (2005). *Evaluation methodology basics: The nuts and bolts of sound evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Scriven, M. (2007). *Key evaluation checklist*. Retrieved from http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/checklists/kec_feb07.pdf

Author Bios

All authors are currently working on a Master of Science degree in Instructional and Performance Technology at Boise State University.

Erica L. Smith is currently the Manager of Learning and Development at Northern Tool + Equipment. She can be reached at ericasmith@u.boisestate.edu.

Jodene Gilman currently works as a Cytotechnologist for the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center. She can be reached at jodene_g@yahoo.com.

Ronda Harris has been in the training field with various companies for nearly ten years and currently works as an instructional designer in the telecommunications industry. She can be reached at helpmeronda1117@gmail.com.

Corinna Provant-Robishaw is currently a Training Coordinator for Overstock.com. She can be reached at corinna.provant@gmail.com.

Scott Rooke is an active duty Lieutenant in the U.S. Coast Guard and is attending college full-time before returning to the service for future assignment as a performance technologist. He can be reached at Scott.P.Rooke@uscg.mil.