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### Enhancing Formal Interpersonal Skills Training through Post-Training Supplements

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# Enhancing Formal Interpersonal Skills Training through Post-Training Supplements

## Abstract

With the aim of enhancing formal classroom training in interpersonal skills, this study examined the effects of combining classroom training with two on-the-job supplements, namely, self-coaching and upward feedback. The self-coaching system used a workbook containing self-assessments, while the feedback system provided trainees with formal, written feedback on their interpersonal skills. Testing these approaches on a sample of 87 trainees from 75 units of a national restaurant chain, this study found that both approaches may be useful extensions to formal classroom training. Moreover, they were strongest when used together.

## Keywords

restaurants, interpersonal skills, training

## Disciplines

Business | Hospitality Administration and Management

## Comments

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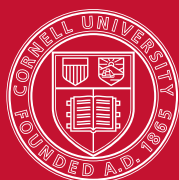


## Cornell Hospitality Report

Enhancing Formal Interpersonal Skills Training through Post-Training Supplements

*by Michael J. Tews, Ph.D., and J. Bruce Tracey, Ph.D.*

Vol. 7, No 5, March 2007



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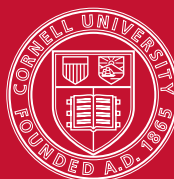
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# Enhancing Formal Interpersonal Skills Training through Post- Training Supplements

By Michael J. Tews and J. Bruce Tracey

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**W**ith the aim of enhancing formal classroom training in interpersonal skills, this study examined the effects of combining classroom training with two on-the-job supplements, namely, self-coaching and upward feedback. The self-coaching system used a workbook containing self-assessments, while the feedback system provided trainees with formal, written feedback on their interpersonal skills. Testing these approaches on a sample of 87 trainees from 75 units of a national restaurant chain, this study found that both approaches may be useful extensions to formal classroom training. Moreover, they were strongest when used together.

# Enhancing the Impact of Formal Interpersonal Skills Training through Post-Training Supplements in the Applied Work Environment

By Michael J. Tews and J. Bruce Tracey

**B**ecause organizations are social entities, effective interpersonal interactions are essential to promoting their effective functioning. Positive interactions among individuals promote favorable employee attitudes, such as enhanced satisfaction and organizational commitment. Furthermore, effective managerial behavior is instrumental in coordinating and motivating employee performance.

The importance of effective interpersonal skills is underscored by research on the service-profit chain, which has proposed that internal service quality (e.g., well-managed human resources systems and the way people serve each other) affects employee satisfaction, performance, and retention.<sup>1</sup> These favorable employee outcomes in turn improve external service quality, customer satisfaction, and

loyalty, which ultimately contribute to greater organizational performance. A central focus of this model is the way in which different groups in the organization interact with one another.

A primary means to promote effective interpersonal skills and, in the language of the service-profit chain, enhance internal and external service quality is formal classroom training. Indeed, surveys by *Training Magazine* indicate that half of the typical organization's training budget is spent on developing the interpersonal skills of employ-

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<sup>1</sup> J.L. Heskett, W.E. Sasser, and L.A. Schlesinger, *The Service-Profit Chain* (New York: The Free Press, 1997).



ees—ranging from organizational leaders to line staff.<sup>2</sup> Such training can focus on improving performance in any of a variety of areas, such as coaching and counseling, conflict management, interviewing, employee performance management, and customer service.

Despite what is obviously a considerable level of investment, interpersonal skills training may not always achieve its desired goal. One view is that individuals who finish such training haven't fully developed their skills and can only perform desired behaviors in a crude and imitative fashion.<sup>3</sup> Beyond that problem is the notion that trainees may not successfully apply their skills once they return to the workplace.<sup>4</sup> Given the value of effective interpersonal skills and the prevalence of training focused on developing such skills, we examined ways to improve the long-term effectiveness of formal training efforts.

This report discusses our investigation of two on-the-job interventions implemented as supplements to formal classroom interpersonal skills training. These supplemental approaches are a self-coaching program and upward feedback. We assessed these supplements in the context of training intended to develop skills in performance management for new managers working in multiple units of a national restaurant chain. The objectives of this training were to enhance the managers' skills in clarifying performance expectations, monitoring employee performance, rewarding effective performance, providing corrective guidance, and inspiring hard work and effort.

## The Importance of Support beyond the Classroom

The importance of providing on-the-job support to individuals after training has been demonstrated in previous research. For example, survey research has illustrated that situational cues and consequences after training are key in facilitating

<sup>2</sup> *Training Magazine 2004 Industry Report* (London: Reed Business Information Limited 2004).

<sup>3</sup> J.C. Georges, "The Myth of Soft-skills Training," *Training*, Vol. 33 (1996), pp. 48-54.

<sup>4</sup> P.J. Taylor, D.F. Russ-Eft, and D.W.L. Chan, "A Meta-analytic Review of Behavior-modeling Training," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 90 (2005), pp. 692-709.

trainees' performance.<sup>5</sup> Situational cues in this instance were goal cues (cues that remind trainees to use the skills they've learned), social cues (influence from supervisors, peers, and subordinates), and task and structural cues (cues relating to the design and the nature of the job itself). Consequences included both feedback and rewards. Related research has provided evidence that organizational support (policies, procedures, and formal reward systems in support of training), managerial support (managerial encouragement for skill development and utilization), and job support (designing jobs to support skill use) are instrumental in promoting individuals' performance after training.<sup>6</sup> While prior work in this area has demonstrated that a variety of training-support approaches may be important, research is necessary to identify supports that are appropriate for specific skills and work contexts. The study described here strives to provide guidance in this area by examining the impact of supports appropriate for managers who work autonomously in the context of interpersonal skill development.

## Self-Coaching

One technique that we examined here is a self-coaching program. In the self-coaching program, which spanned five weeks during this study, participants use a written workbook that includes four components (see Exhibit 1, next page). For the first component, participants fill out a self assessment of the key actions addressed in training. Specifically, trainees complete a checklist once per week where they indicate the frequency in which they engaged in specific interpersonal skill activities. This checklist contains items relating to clarifying expectations, monitoring, rewarding, correcting, and inspiring their employees.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> J.A. Rouiller and I.L. Goldstein, "The Relationship between Organizational Transfer Climate and Positive Transfer of Training," *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, Vol. 4 (1993), pp. 377-390.

<sup>6</sup> J.B. Tracey, S.I. Tannenbaum, and M.J. Kavanagh, "Applying Trained Skills on the Job: The Importance of the Work Environment," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 80 (1995), pp. 239-252.

<sup>7</sup> The clarifying-expectations, monitoring, rewarding, and inspiring items are based on: G. Yukl, S. Wall, and R. Lepsinger, "Preliminary Report on Validation of the Managerial-practices Survey," in *Measures of Leadership*, ed. K.E. Clark and M.B. Clark (Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership, 1990), pp. 223-223). The correcting items were developed specifically for this study.

## Self-coaching workbook components

### Part 1: Standardized Behavioral Assessment

Please evaluate your performance during the past week.

#### Clarifying Expectations

1. I clearly explained employees' job responsibilities
2. I clearly explained what results employees were expected to achieve
3. I clearly specified when specific tasks needed to be completed
4. I met with employees to set clear and specific goals
5. I clearly explained what aspects of work had the highest priority

Not at all	Once in a while	Some-times	Fairly Often	Frequently
0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0

#### Monitoring

1. I followed up after making a request to verify that it was done
2. I walked around to observe how employees' work was going
3. I checked on the quality of employees' work (e.g., inspected it, spoke with customers)
4. I checked work against established expectations to see if it was on target

Not at all	Once in a while	Some-times	Fairly Often	Frequently
0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0

#### Rewarding

1. I complimented employees for demonstrating creativity, initiative, persistence, or skill
2. I gave credit for helpful ideas and suggestions
3. I expressed personal appreciation when something was done that required special effort
4. I recognized special contributions and achievements by acknowledging them publicly
5. I praised improvements in performance
6. I rewarded employees meaningfully when they performed well or completed a large project

Not at all	Once in a while	Some-times	Fairly Often	Frequently
0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0

#### Correcting

1. I showed genuine interest to employees in improving their performance
2. I clearly explained where performance needed to improve
3. I clearly showed employees how to improve their performance
4. I worked with employees to develop performance improvement strategies
5. I provided the necessary resources and support to improve performance

Not at all	Once in a while	Some-times	Fairly Often	Frequently
0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0

#### Inspiring

1. I communicated convincingly about the importance of high levels of productivity and service
2. I developed enthusiasm for hard work through competition, such as contests and games
3. I proposed challenging but realistic goals to motivate performance
4. I tried to inspire hard work by setting an example through my own behavior
5. I developed enthusiasm for hard work by assigning challenging tasks

Not at all	Once in a while	Some-times	Fairly Often	Frequently
0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0

The second component is also written, a self assessment in which trainees reflect on specific job-related interpersonal incidents through a series of open-ended questions. For instance, the self-coaching program directs trainees to reflect on their most successful and most challenging interpersonal interactions during the previous week, examine why they

were successful or not, and articulate how performance could be enhanced in the future. Having trainees reflect on specific situations and analyze the extent of their success should provide more learning than filling out the checklist alone. Researchers have found that active processing of one's experiences in this way provides a means to promote learn-

## Part 2: Open-ended Questions

1. Describe the most challenging employee situation you encountered this week. In what ways did you manage the situation well, and how would you handle a similar situation differently in the future?
2. Describe your most successful interaction with an employee this week. What made this encounter particularly effective?
3. Consider an employee situation that you executed "almost right." What worked well, and how could your performance be improved in the future?
4. What behaviors or practices (e.g., clarifying expectations, monitoring, praising, etc.) do you feel you executed too little or too much this past week? Please explain why you feel you executed these behaviors or practices too much or too little.

## Part 3: Next Week's Development Plan

Based on your personal performance assessment and responses to the open-ended questions, establish three specific and challenging goals for the upcoming week. In addition, identify corresponding strategies to help you achieve these goals.

### 1. Continuance Goal

Establish one goal to continue or improve upon a specific behavior or activity that you feel is one of your strengths in managing the performance of others.

### 2. Stop Goal

Establish one goal to minimize or stop engaging in a specific behavior or activity that you feel impedes your success in managing the performance of others.

### 3. Start Goal

Establish one goal to engage in a specific behavior or activity that you believe will improve your success in managing the performance of others.

## Part 4: Development Plan Follow-up

Review your action plan and goals from last week. Describe how successful you were in achieving your three goals.

ing and improve performance.<sup>8</sup> As such, this assessment may provide trainees with detailed self-generated feedback for enhancing their interpersonal skills.

<sup>8</sup> D. Boud, R. Keogh, and D. Walker, "Promoting Reflection in Learning: A Model," in *Reflection: Tuning Experience into Learning*, ed. D. Boud, R. Keogh, and D. Walker (New York: Nichols, 1985), pp. 18-40.

The third and fourth components focus on goal setting. Important though insight is, alone it does not translate into effective performance. Consequently, following the reflective assessments, a goal-setting worksheet is included to direct future performance. Trainees are directed to generate goals that enhance their job performance along with strategies

## Hypothetical sample upward feedback report

## Section 1: Overall Scores

	Self	Employees	Gap
<b>Clarifying Expectations</b>	4.40	4.02	0.38
<b>Monitoring</b>	4.40	4.23	0.17
<b>Rewarding</b>	5.00	4.19	0.81
<b>Correcting</b>	4.50	3.64	0.86
<b>Inspiring</b>	4.17	3.65	0.51

## Section 2: Individual Item Scores

	Self	Employees	Gap
<b>Clarifying Expectations</b>			
1. Clearly explains your job responsibilities	4.00	4.23	-0.23
2. Clearly explains what results you are expected to achieve	5.00	4.23	0.77
3. Clearly specifies when specific tasks need to be completed	5.00	4.38	0.62
4. Meets with you to set clear and specific goals	4.00	3.08	0.92
5. Clearly explains what aspects of work have the highest priority	4.00	4.15	-0.15
<b>Monitoring</b>			
1. Follows up after making a request to verify that it was done	4.00	4.46	-0.46
2. Walks around to observe how your work is going	5.00	5.00	0
3. Checks on the quality of your work (e.g., inspects it, speaks with customers)	5.00	4.69	0.31
4. checks your work against established expectations to see if it's on target	4.00	3.15	0.15
<b>Rewarding</b>			
1. Compliments you for demonstrating creativity, initiative, persistence, or skill	5.00	4.62	0.38
2. Gives you credit for helpful ideas and suggestions	5.00	4.31	0.69
3. Expresses personal appreciation when you do something that requires special effort	5.00	4.85	0.15
4. Recognizes special contributions and important achievements by acknowledging them publicly	5.00	4.00	1.00
5. Clearly explains why your performance is good—provides specific examples	5.00	3.69	1.31
6. Praises improvements in your performance	5.00	4.54	0.46
7. Rewards you meaningfully when you perform especially well or complete a large project	5.00	3.31	1.69
<b>Correcting</b>			
1. Shows genuine interest in improving your performance	5.00	4.08	0.92
2. Constructively discusses performance concerns with you	4.00	3.69	0.13
3. Clearly explains where your performance needs to improve	4.00	3.62	0.31
4. Clearly shows you how to improve your performance	5.00	3.69	1.31
5. Works with you to develop performance improvement strategies	4.00	3.08	0.92
6. Provides the necessary support to improve performance	5.00	3.69	1.31
<b>Inspiring</b>			
1. talks convincingly about the importance of improving productivity and service	4.00	3.85	0.15
2. develops enthusiasm for hard work through competition, such as contests and games	4.00	3.00	1.00
3. describes a clear vision of what can be accomplished through your hard work	4.00	3.46	0.54
4. proposes challenging but realistic goals to improve performance	4.00	3.54	0.46
5. inspires you to work hard by setting an example through his/her own behavior	5.00	4.77	0.23
6. develops enthusiasm for hard work by assigning challenging tasks	4.00	3.31	0.69

## Section 3: High and Low Scores

### Highest Scores

1. Walks around to observe how your work is going ..... (5.00)
2. Expresses personal appreciation when you do something that requires special effort ..... (4.85)
3. Inspires you to work hard by setting an example through his/her own behavior..... (4.77)
4. Checks on the quality of your work (e.g., inspects it, speaks with customers) ..... (4.69)
5. Compliments you for demonstrating creativity, initiative, persistence, or skill ..... (4.62)

### Lowest Scores

1. Develops enthusiasm for hard work through competition, such as contests and games ..... (3.00)
2. Meets with you to set clear and specific goals ..... (3.08)
3. Works with you to develop performance improvement strategies ..... (3.08)
4. Meets with you to review your progress on a task or project that you're doing for him or her ..... (3.15)
5. Rewards you in a way meaningful to you when you perform especially well or complete a large project..... (3.31)

## Self–Employee Rating Gaps

### Highest Discrepancies

1. Rewards you in a way meaningful to you when you perform especially well or complete a large project ..... (1.69)
2. Clearly explains why your performance is good—provides specific examples ..... (1.31)
3. Clearly shows you how to improve your performance ..... (1.31)
4. Provides the necessary support to help you improve performance ..... (1.31)
5. Recognizes special contributions and important achievements by acknowledging them publicly ..... (1.00)

### Lowest Discrepancies

1. Walks around to observe how your work is going ..... (0.00)
2. Checks your work against established expectations to see if it's on target ..... (0.15)
3. Talks convincingly about the importance of improving productivity and service ..... (0.15)
4. Expresses personal appreciation when you do something that requires special effort ..... (0.15)
5. Explains what aspects of work have the highest priority ..... (-0.15)

*Note:* Positive values indicate where you rated yourself higher than your employees, and negative values indicate where your employees rated you higher than you did.

## Section 4: Employee Comments

The following comments reflect your employees' suggestions for continued and improved managerial performance. These comments represent: (1) what your employees perceive you do well and should continue; (2) what they would like to see you start doing; and (3) what behavior they would prefer to see less of. When interpreting these comments, focus on general and recurring themes.

### Continue

- Being open to employee suggestions.
- Praising us for a job well done.
- Displaying great enthusiasm and energy.
- Helping out when needed (e.g., bussing during busy shifts).

### Start

- Explaining performance expectations more clearly.
- Giving us more latitude in deciding how to do our work.
- Helping out in the back of the house more often.
- Providing clearer directions, at times.
- Using incentives more often to motivate us to achieve sales goals.

### Stop

- Being overly critical when we've made mistakes.
- Being too helpful at times; sometimes I feel micro-managed.
- Trying to do too much yourself; I think you should delegate more.

to facilitate goal attainment. The final component of the program is a worksheet to help trainees assess the extent to which their goals from previous weeks were achieved.

## Upward Feedback

The other training support that we examined is upward feedback, a variation 360-degree feedback in which managers receive performance feedback from their direct reports, or subordinates. The rationale for using 360-degree feedback systems is that individuals need feedback from others beyond supervisors, who typically conduct performance appraisals. Further, a formalized, anonymous feedback system may be particularly useful to support interpersonal skill development. Because raters remain anonymous, such a system may facilitate the sharing of information that might not otherwise be communicated. Given the personal nature of interpersonal feedback, subordinates may not share such feedback directly. With a formalized, anonymous system, however, more candid interpersonal feedback may be shared with less fear of repercussions.

The raters in this 360-degree feedback system were limited to the trainees' subordinates, making it more of a 180-degree system. The critical factor in selecting raters is an individual's opportunity to observe someone's behavior.<sup>9</sup> In this case, because performance management behavior is directed toward subordinates, these individuals were selected as the primary raters. The supervisors also provided self-ratings that were used to highlight any discrepancies between self-perceptions and subordinates' ratings.

The subordinates rated their managers' post-training performance in two ways. One, they provided ratings on the dimensions of clarifying expectations, monitoring, rewarding, correcting, and inspiring. Two, they provided written examples of: (1) what the manager does well and should continue doing; (2) what the manager should begin doing; and (3) what the manager should do less frequently.

The feedback report comprises six sections (as shown in the sample report in Exhibit 2). The first three sections provide data on the different performance dimensions, including the manager's self-report ratings, the average employee ratings, and gaps between the manager's and the employees' ratings. The first section provides overall scores, while the second section provides scores for the individual scale items. The third section identifies the individual items with the five highest and five lowest subordinate ratings the five largest and five smallest manager-subordinate rating gaps. The fourth section provides the subordinates' comments. The fifth section is a goal-setting worksheet for the manager-trainees to establish performance improvement goals based

<sup>9</sup> H.R. Rothstein, "Interrater Reliability of Job Performance Rating: Growth to Asymptote Level with Increasing Opportunity to Observe," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 75 (1990), pp. 322-327.

on the feedback they received. The final section, which is not shown in the exhibit, is a goal-reflection worksheet for a manager to assess the extent the goals were later achieved.

## Hypotheses

Self-coaching and upward feedback may help managers to perfect their interpersonal skills following training in at least three ways. On a general level, the presence of a post-training supplement may signal the organization's emphasis on the importance of effective interpersonal skills and may thus motivate individuals to apply training content. With respect to interpersonal skills, supplemental cues may be important for persons for whom interpersonal skills are not "hard coded" into their work and who may perceive the use of such skills as discretionary. In the absence of such cues, individuals may neglect interpersonal responsibilities and focus on what they perceive to be more central aspects of their work.

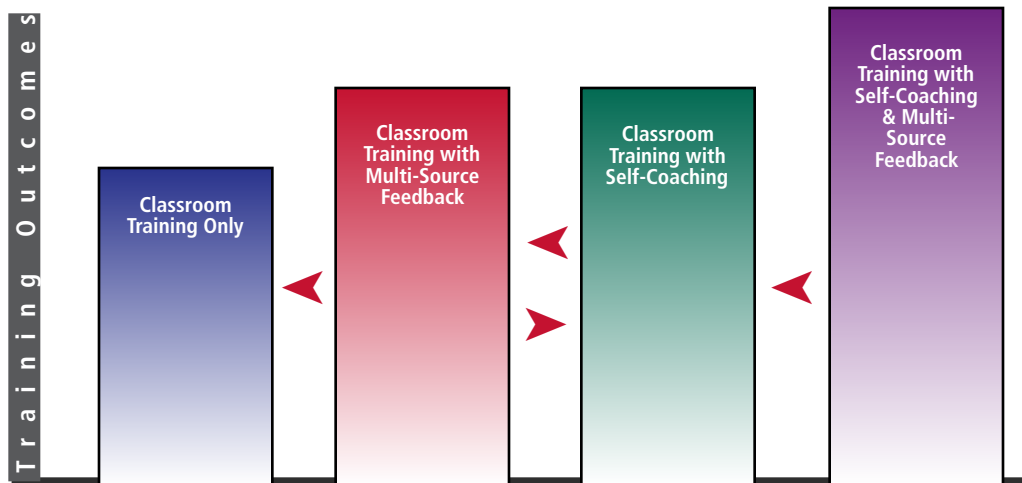
The post-training supplements may also enhance training by reinforcing content addressed in the classroom. Knowledge and skill decay may occur over time, and "refresher" training may be necessary. Reflecting on expectations for the use of interpersonal skills via the self-coaching or upward feedback interventions may serve as a form of refresher training and may thus direct trainees' on-the-job efforts.

Finally, the self-coaching and upward feedback may supplement formal training by promoting further skill development in a natural learning environment. For example, practice opportunities that take place within the classroom, such as role-playing exercises, may be limited in promoting full skill acquisition because trainees are not confronted with the same pressures and consequences for their actions that they face on the job. As such, trainees may not always perceive these exercises as serious learning endeavors, or they may not experience the difficulties and complexities that might interfere with using the newly learned skills. In either case, trainees might not perform as they otherwise would in a natural context where they could receive meaningful developmental feedback. However, post-training interventions may provide opportunities to develop focal skills more completely by adding realism to the learning experience.

This discussion is not meant in any way to diminish the importance of formal classroom training. Without a doubt, formal classroom training can lay a foundation for developing interpersonal skills. Our point here is that reinforcing classroom training should strengthen formal training, and thus help ensure that training objectives are more fully realized. That is, training should not be an isolated classroom activity, but rather an integrated system of formal and on-the-job activities.



## Hypothesized relationships of the experimental conditions on the training outcomes



We examined the effects of self-coaching and upward feedback on the following three training outcomes: trainees' interpersonal skills, trainees' confidence in their interpersonal skills (that is, self efficacy), and subordinates' job dedication, which includes engaging in such disciplined behavior as working hard and taking initiative.

We compared these training outcomes across four groups. The first group had no support at all, just the classroom training. The second had classroom training with self coaching, and the third group experienced classroom training along with upward feedback. The fourth group used all three techniques: classroom training, self coaching, and upward feedback. Our first hypothesis was that managers who participated in either post-training supplement would benefit more from the training than those who attended classroom training only. In addition, we expected that participating in both self-coaching and upward feedback would be better than participating in either one alone as a post-training supplement. Finally, we compared self-coaching to upward feedback to see whether one of those was a superior supplement to the other. These hypotheses are presented graphically in Exhibit 3.

### Sample and Context

This study was sponsored by a company that owns and operates approximately 120 casual-theme restaurants throughout the United States. Ninety-six trainees began this study, representing all of the chain's new managers during the study

period, but nine managers left the organization prior to the completion of the research. Of the remaining 87 managers, 76 were men, their average age was 31 years, and they averaged approximately seven years of previous experience. Eight participants listed themselves as African American or black, four as Hispanic or Latino, and one was Asian.

### Research Design and Treatment Administration

We employed a quasi-experimental design, where different groups of trainees were assigned to the different training designs. The organization's formal training sessions, which are held in its central training center, are conducted about every other month. In this study each of the four groups received a different training design. Twenty-one managers participated in classroom training only; 22 in classroom training with self-coaching; 23 in classroom training with upward feedback; and 21 in classroom training with self-coaching and upward feedback. These groups were approximately equivalent with respect to demographic characteristics and previous experience.

The supplements were implemented and the training outcomes were assessed during a ten-week period on the job after the formal training. The self-coaching managers received their workbooks during the first week of this period and completed their materials over the following five weeks. The upward feedback managers received a packet for administering the feedback assessments during the third week of the ten-week period. These participants were required to

## Training outcomes for four training approaches

	Classroom Training Only	Self-Coaching	Multi-Source Feedback	Self-Coaching & Multi-Source Feedback
<b>Interpersonal Skill Performance</b>	3.81	4.00	4.15	4.27
<b>Task Self-Efficacy</b>	3.95	4.22	4.00	4.06
<b>Subordinate Job Dedication</b>	4.05	4.15	4.19	4.27

complete survey administration within a week's time and return the completed assessments to us for compilation of their feedback reports. We provided the upward feedback reports to that group of managers approximately during the fifth week of the study period. Training outcomes for all the managers were assessed via survey measures at the end of the ten-week period.

### Measures

The training outcomes were assessed with the following measures.

**Self-efficacy.** The trainees fill out seven items to assess their self-efficacy beliefs.<sup>10</sup> As an example, one item states: "I feel confident in my ability to manage the performance of employees." Response choices ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree.)<sup>11</sup>

**Interpersonal skills.** Trainees' interpersonal skills were assessed by their subordinates. Using the same 25 items from the self-coaching program and upward feedback assessments, the subordinates rated the frequency in which the managers used specific skills. Scale anchors ranged from 1 (never) to 5 (frequently, if not always). An average of 11 subordinates provided ratings for each manager.

**Subordinate dedication.** Subordinates' job dedication was captured using eight items.<sup>12</sup> One item, for instance, was: "I work harder than necessary." Response choices ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

### Results

Exhibit 4 presents the means of the training outcomes for each of the four test groups. We found that our hypotheses were generally supported, but with certain caveats.

**Single training supports.** The self-coaching program had a statistically significant, positive effect on all three training outcomes beyond classroom training, as we proposed.<sup>13</sup> Upward feedback had a significant, positive effect on trainees' interpersonal skills and subordinates' job dedication. Although participants who received upward feedback rated their self-efficacy higher than those who had classroom instruction only, the difference was not statistically significant.

**Combined training support.** Combining the two supplements had a statistically significant effect on interpersonal skills and on subordinates' job dedication beyond the effect of self-coaching only, but that significant effect did not extend to self-efficacy. Although mean scores for the group with both training supports were higher than those who received upward feedback for all three training outcomes, these differences were not statistically significant.<sup>14</sup>

**Techniques compared.** There were no significant differences on any of the training outcomes between the group that used only self-coaching and the group that received upward feedback alone. The upward feedback group's mean scores were higher for interpersonal skills and subordinates' dedication, and the self-coaching trainees gave themselves higher marks on self-efficacy, but not significantly so in any case.

### Discussion

Both training supplements enhanced the managers' interpersonal skills. Managers who participated in either supplement exhibited stronger interpersonal skills than did those individuals who attended formal classroom training only. In addition, the managers who participated in both self-coaching and upward feedback exhibited better interpersonal

<sup>10</sup> Items based on: J.J. Martocchio and J. Webster, "Effects of Feedback and Cognitive Playfulness on Performance in Microcomputer Software Training," *Personnel Psychology*, Vol. 45 (1992), pp. 553-578.

<sup>11</sup> The trainee's post-training scores were adjusted for a pre-training measure that was obtained at the beginning of the classroom training session.

<sup>12</sup> Items based on: J.R. Van Scotter and S.J. Motowidlo, "Interpersonal Facilitation and Job Dedication as Separate Facets of Contextual Performance," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 81 (1996), pp. 525-531.

<sup>13</sup> The hypotheses were examined with t-tests to assess statistically significant mean differences. A *p*-value less than .10 was used to define significance due to the relatively small sample size.

<sup>14</sup> The *p*-values for interpersonal skill performance and subordinate job dedication were .12 and .10, respectively. Although not statistically significant below the .10 level, these values approach conventional significance levels.

skills than did those who participated in a single post-training supplement.

Although this study suggests that training can be strengthened by the combination of self coaching and upward feedback, the study does not indicate whether one or the other is better at supporting classroom training. The mean score was higher for the managers who experienced upward feedback, but the difference was not significant. Given the slightly higher score for upward feedback, one could argue that post-training performance may be better solidified by feedback from the targets of one's interpersonal skill efforts. Individuals may have blind spots regarding their strengths and areas that need improvement. They may thus require feedback from others to facilitate their interpersonal growth.

The peculiar finding from this study is the way trainees in different groups regarded their self-efficacy. The self-coaching trainees reported higher scores than the classroom-only trainees, but the trainees using upward feedback did not have a significantly higher self-efficacy score than did the classroom-only group. What is interesting about this finding is that the upward feedback trainees' interpersonal skills were rated (by others) to be better than the skills of those who attended formal classroom training only.

One possible explanation for why upward feedback may not have been demonstrated to influence self-efficacy is that the initial feedback may have diminished trainees' beliefs in their own competence. After that setback, even if the trainees' opinions of their performance improved during the study, their self-efficacy score may have merely struggled back to the original baseline.

Adding to the initial shock of upward feedback, trainees may never have been told that their interpersonal skills were superior to those who attended formal classroom training only. From the time when trainees received their formal feedback to the final self-efficacy assessment, trainees may not have received positive feedback on their performance improvements to support enhanced self-efficacy beliefs.

People do need to believe that they are doing a good job and that their training was worthwhile. To that end, we suggest two potential strategies if a company is to employ upward feedback. One strategy is providing regular formal feedback, rather than a single round of commentaries, making sure to highlight performance improvements as time goes on. This would allow managers to monitor their performance improvement over time. A second strategy is supplementing upward feedback with self-coaching after individuals receive feedback, given that self-coaching was demonstrated to improve the managers' self-efficacy beliefs. In the absence of additional feedback from others, a self-coaching program could be a resource for individuals to measure their progress against a given standard.

This study demonstrated that supporting the managers' training also improved their subordinates' dedication. So it is that the augmented training designs not only benefited the trainees, but their employees as well. This finding is important, since one of the key reasons to develop managers' employee-management skills is to improve their ability to support their employees.

## Implementation Considerations

This report illustrates the usefulness of self-coaching and upward feedback to support formal classroom training in interpersonal skills. Implementing these supplements, though, should be carefully undertaken. Consideration should be paid to the design, the necessary organizational support, and the trade-offs between self-coaching and upward feedback (if an organization uses just one of the approaches).

**Designing training supports.** One feature which we believe helped ensure that the training supports were effective was that they involved specific performance dimensions that were consistent across the formal classroom training, self-coaching, and upward feedback. Integration of that type provided reinforcement and continuity. Moreover, specification of specific behavioral performance dimensions helped ensure that trainees' performance expectations were clearly defined.

The participants in this study provided suggestions that should enhance the interventions. Those in the self-coaching program recommended distributing the program content over a period longer than five weeks. Some trainees indicated that having more time would help reduce the weekly burden of completing the workbook materials. Others suggested that providing a greater period of time between completing materials would allow for more time to put their interpersonal skills to work, and thus make the development exercise more meaningful. Accordingly, it may be worthwhile to change the program from a weekly developmental exercise over a five-week period to a bi-weekly activity over a period of ten weeks.

One suggestion for the upward feedback process was to allow a longer period of time for the trainees to be observed on the job prior to having their performance assessed for their formal feedback reports. We and the company's vice president of human resources thought that three weeks was a sufficient period for the subordinates to observe the performance of their supervisors. However, some trainees and subordinates indicated on their survey responses that they had not had enough interactions to allow an accurate assessment. The value of this procedure is improved when individuals perceive the feedback process as valid and when feedback ratings accurately reflect individuals' development needs.

While formal classroom training provides an excellent beginning to skill improvement efforts, additional activities will ensure that skills are applied on the job.

**Organizational supports.** Research has shown that top management's commitment and the dedication of appropriate resources are critical elements in ensuring that training is successful.<sup>15</sup> Support in this study came from the company's vice president of human resources, who strongly supported implementing the post-training supplements. He conducted the formal classroom training where he introduced the procedures and emphasized the value of extending development beyond the classroom. Through conference calls with general managers and regional directors across the country, the VP explained the training supplements, so that these executives would support their manager trainees and ensure their compliance. Finally, the sponsoring organization provided administrative support to monitor trainees' compliance and follow through with them via e-mail and telephone in the event that materials were not submitted in a timely fashion. While different organizations will handle such support in various ways, what appears critical is educating key constituents on the nature of the training activities and providing the means to help guarantee compliance.

**Choosing a particular support system.** To guide a choice of whether to use a particular post-training supplement over the other, one should consider the level of expertise required for the program and the amount of effort it requires. In particular, consideration should be paid to

<sup>15</sup> Tracey *et al.*, *op.cit.*

the extent of an organization's internal expertise in designing and implementing an intervention. An upward feedback system requires more expertise than does a self-coaching program. Among other things, implementing an upward feedback system requires skill in survey design and administration, data collection and analysis, and developing systems to return results back to participants. Implementing a self-coaching program also requires expertise, yet such expertise is limited to the initial design of the program. In addition, attention should be paid to the amount of effort required on the part of trainees and necessary administrative follow-up. The upward feedback intervention required less effort on behalf of the trainees and less administrative follow-up than the self-coaching program. Trainees participating in upward feedback were required to complete self-assessments and obtain feedback from their subordinates just once. In comparison, the self-coaching program required more trainee effort and administrative follow-up as the trainees were required to complete and submit materials each week.

Most people can benefit from training to improve their interpersonal skills. While formal classroom training provides an excellent beginning to skill improvement efforts, classroom work should be enhanced by additional activities to ensure that skills are applied on the job and more fully develop over time. Our work presented here suggests that self-coaching and upward feedback may be two ways of strengthening those skills. ■

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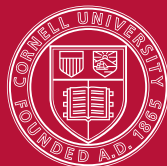
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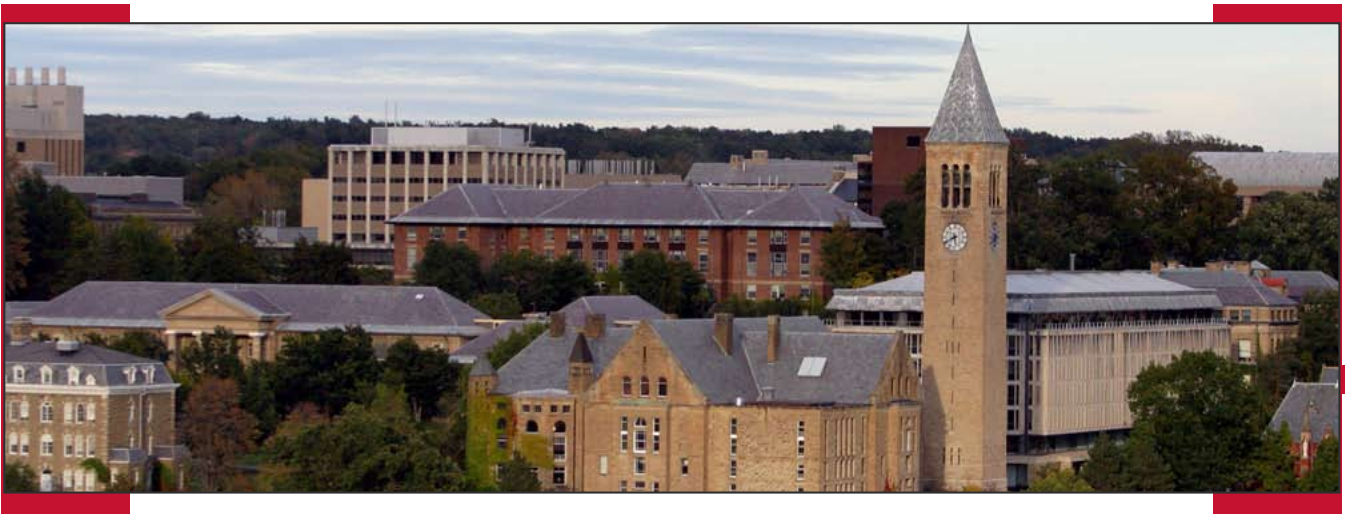
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