

IMPLEMENTING THE FOUR LEVELS

**A Practical Guide for
Effective Evaluation
of Training Programs**



**Donald L. Kirkpatrick
and James D. Kirkpatrick**

Coauthors of the bestselling *Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels*

An Excerpt From

***Implementing the Four Levels:
A Practical Guide for Effective Evaluation of Training Programs***

by Donald L. Kirkpatrick and James D. Kirkpatrick
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Foreword

Don and Jim Kirkpatrick's *Implementing the Four Levels* will undoubtedly prove to be a cherished and well-used tool throughout the learning and development (L&D) community. The beauty of this edition is that trainers, designers, training managers, and training executives will all benefit from its action-oriented design and approach to Don's timeless measurement principles.

Trainers will use the tools and case study discussions to shift their daily focus beyond the learner's reaction to having a strategic business impact via learning. Training managers will use the real-life examples and guidelines to prepare results-driven programs and training teams prior to opening a classroom for learning. Training executives will especially benefit from the "Building a Chain of Evidence" chapter (Chapter 7) as they look to quantify the business benefits of L&D organizations.

The design community will perhaps enjoy this edition greater than any other. Using actual business cases that illustrate Don's levels in reverse order, designers can see how interviewing key stakeholders and subject matter experts guarantees a design that directly links coursework to the needs of the organization.

As Albert Einstein was to the scientific community, Don Kirkpatrick is to the learning and development community. However, the difference is that in this edition, Don and Jim have found a way to make theory and principle simple and easily implemented regardless of the reader's L&D experience.

I have used Don and Jim's collective works to create training

programs, training teams, and training organizations that are viewed by the business as a competitive advantage rather than a required expense. If you are looking for the silver bullet to take your L&D efforts from expense to cherished asset, you've found it in this terrific resource!

Jim Hashman
Division Director
Sales Learning and Development
Comcast University
Southfield, Michigan

Foreword

In the world of training in business, industry, and government, theories and models are used to help design, develop, implement, and evaluate training. Their value is directly related to how well these tools help evaluate programs and achieve results such as improved morale, reduced turnover, improved customer satisfaction, increased sales, and increased profits. One of the biggest challenges training professionals have is to take these theories and models and apply them to their own organization.

Don's book, *Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels*, has been the standard for decades in helping training professionals develop and evaluate training programs. In his book, he provides a clear overview of each of the four levels, guidelines for each level, and case studies that highlight specific applications of the four levels in real-world situations. These case studies are written by folks in business, industry, education, and government and describe how Kirkpatrick's models were implemented and the results achieved.

There are three unique features of this new book:

- The active involvement of managers in the four-level process
- The numerous “best practice” examples for evaluating each level organized by chapter
- The building of a compelling “chain of evidence” to demonstrate the value of training to the business

Knowing the four levels is not enough. It is one thing to know what the four different levels are—it is an entirely different thing to

work with managers and others to implement them. In this new book, Jim and Don take the next logical step and provide the reader with practical information on applying the model more effectively. Specifically, they present valuable help on making evaluation decisions and getting buy-in and support from management. In addition, they have reviewed each case study from the basic book and gleaned out the practical applications from them for the reader in an organized, comprehensive manner.

This book is complementary to *Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels*. It is not meant to replace it. I am delighted that you will not have to discover the practical ways to evaluate and improve training programs. You now have a resource that can help you be more effective in your role in implementing Kirkpatrick's four levels.

Dan Schuch
Training Developer
PacifiCorp
Portland, Oregon

Preface

The purpose of this book is to make it easy for you, the reader, to understand the four levels that I (Don) have developed, and to obtain practical help on how to apply any one or all of them. The book is intended as an addition to and not a replacement for the basic book, *Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels*, third edition.

We have added three chapters and taken the forms, examples, and approaches from the basic book and inserted them into the appropriate chapters. For example, Chapter 3, “Evaluating Level 1: Reaction,” contains select reaction forms and approaches from the case studies in the basic book.

The first chapter suggests how you can decide what to evaluate and at what levels. The answer, of course, is by analyzing the available resources.

The second chapter tells you why and how to get managers on board. They can be very helpful in developing curriculum and are needed to provide support and accountability when trainees move from the classroom to the job. Also, you will need their help when you evaluate levels 3 and 4, where you have no authority, only influence. Chapters 3–6 provide guidelines and practical help for evaluating at each of the four levels.

Finally, the last chapter, “Building a Chain of Evidence,” explains why it is necessary to evaluate all the levels in *sequence* and not try to measure results without first evaluating at the first three levels. This is the best way to demonstrate the value of training.

We want to thank each of the following authors who contributed

examples from their case studies that were an important part of the basic book: Derrick Allman, Jennifer Altzner, Merrill Anderson, Chris Arvin, James Baker, David Barron, Judy Brooke, Holly Burkett, Nuria Duran, Gena Gongora, Steven Jablonski, Abram Kaplan, Don Kraft, Gusti Lowenberg, Jordan Mora, Patrick O'Hara, Gillian Poe, Laura Rech, Dan Schuch, and Juan Pablo Ventosa. We also want to thank Sara Jane Hope, Chris Lee, and Beverly Scherf, who spent many hours reviewing an early draft from a reader's standpoint and offering helpful suggestions on how to improve it.

We are also grateful to Jeevan Sivasubramanian, Steve Piersanti of Berrett-Koehler, and especially the editors, Debbie Masi and Cheryl Adams, who transformed our contributions into the finished book.

We cannot forget Fern, my wife and Jim's mother, for her understanding, patience, and encouragement for all the hours we spent writing and rewriting the book.

If you have questions about what we offer in the way of programs, services, books, and inventories, please see our contact information in The Authors section.

Best wishes for finding this book of practical help in evaluating your programs.

Don and Jim

Chapter 1

Analyzing Your Resources

As the preface stated, this is a practical guide to help you understand and implement the “four levels” that I (Don) have developed for evaluating training programs. You have probably heard of them and perhaps implemented one or more of them. Before describing the specifics of implementing Reaction, Learning, Behavior, and Results, there are two introductory chapters that are critical to set the table for training and evaluation success. The first is “Analyzing Your Resources,” and the second is “Getting Your Managers on Board.”

In this chapter, we will describe an approach for analyzing your resources to determine

what programs to evaluate
at which of the four levels

The answer, of course, depends largely on the resources you have for evaluating. In most organizations, trainers wear many “hats,” of which evaluation is one. A few organizations have specialists whose only job is to evaluate. The available resources in terms of people, time, and budget are the critical factors to consider when approaching these two issues.

Look first within the training function for any full-time professionals who can spend full time on evaluation. Then look at other training professionals who have evaluation as one of their responsibilities. Determine how much of their time can be devoted to evaluation. Unfortunately, many training department managers view evaluation as

“a smile sheet, a pre- and postknowledge, and hope for the best.” They do not understand the tremendous power of evaluation not only to improve courses and programs, but also to reinforce mission-critical behaviors on the job, and to demonstrate the value of their efforts. This often causes them to be reluctant to “release” resources dedicated to evaluation.

Second, look at related departments such as Human Resources. Are there people there who are ready, willing, and able to help in the evaluation process? How much time can they invest?

The third source of help is the line managers. If you have programs for salespeople, for example, how much help can you get from sales managers and others in the sales departments? If your programs are aimed at computer specialists, how much help can you get from Information Technology people? If you are teaching courses for supervisors, how much help can you get from their managers?

The final source of help can be outside consultants. Here, you look at your budget and see what you can afford.

When you add all of this help together, you can estimate how much time and effort you can give to evaluation. With the likelihood of limited training department resources, competing priorities that limit the help from other internal departments, questionable help from managers, and a limited budget for outside consultants, evaluation needs to be targeted to programs that will accomplish the best results.

As a case in point, a new program on leadership that was developed to leverage all other training and is a high-profile program in the eyes of executives should receive a full-blown, four-level effort, with the focus on demonstrating the value of the program to organizational goals. Another significant consideration is which programs executives are most interested in. For example, top executives may be most interested in programs on a “culture of service” when training managers are more interested in evaluating programs on “coaching.” You may have a “selling job” if you can’t do both and decide on the latter. Other considerations are which programs are going to be repeated, which programs are the most expensive, and which programs are the most likely to contribute significant bottom-line results. These factors will help you to determine what programs to evaluate, how robust your evaluation efforts should be, and which of the four levels you should emphasize.

We also strongly suggest that you take the right steps to ensure that training is actually accomplishing what it was intended to do and contributing to the bottom line. Don't think about evaluation in terms of demonstrating overall value until you are sure you have done all you can to ensure that your training programs are effective. If you evaluate and find that the training programs have not been effective, you will need to back up through levels 3, 2, and 1 and find the "snags"—the factors that are keeping maximization of learning from happening.

The second part of this chapter has to do with a simple statement—you want to do what you can to ensure that the program you have decided to deploy your resources to is one that is of the best quality possible. In other words, you want to do what you can to see that the program meets the needs of your stakeholders, the business problem or need, and is delivered in the most effective way possible for the group for which it is intended.

We have made a list of ten requirements for an effective training program. Actually, there are only nine, and the tenth one is evaluation. So, take care of the following requirements for effective training so that any evaluation will show positive results.

Ten Requirements for an Effective Training Program

1. **Base the program on the needs of the participants.**

This is the most fundamental of the ten requirements. If the program does not meet participants' needs, the results of evaluating might be disastrous.

There are a number of ways to determine needs. Some of the more practical approaches are as follows:

- Ask the participants themselves. This can be done through a survey asking them what knowledge and/or skills they feel they need to do their jobs better. (See pages 16–19 for details.)
- Ask the managers of the participants what knowledge and/or skills they think their subordinates need. Not only will this provide valuable information to consider in planning the curriculum, but it will also help to create a relationship with the managers regarding their acceptance and support of the

program. And this is important in giving them a feeling of “ownership” regarding the program.

- Ask their subordinates what knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes they think their supervisors need. This is obviously an approach that is risky, as those of you familiar with “360 degree feedback” know. Many supervisors don’t appreciate “criticism” from subordinates. You can call it suggestions, but any suggestion is telling the person what to do or what to quit doing. And no matter how tactfully it is offered with a sincere desire to be helpful, there is a good chance that it will be taken as criticism and resented. This is obviously not true of all supervisors but is frequent enough to suggest caution. Having said that, 360 degree feedback done in the right way and in the right culture is an extremely effective (level 3) evaluation methodology.
- Study the performance appraisals of the participants. This will give you clues as to their strengths and weaknesses. If you are not part of Human Resources, here is where cooperation with that department is important and can be strengthened.

2. Set learning objectives.

The needs must be converted to objectives that state what participants are expected to learn in the program. We also suggest that you consider developing objectives that reflect expected behavior change on the job. This will help set the table for evaluating level 3 after the course is over, and helps us avoid the tendency to think our jobs stop when participants leave the classroom.

In a training program, an instructor has three possible objectives: to increase knowledge, increase skills, and change attitudes.

For example, if you are teaching Kirkpatrick’s “four levels,” your learning objectives for Reaction and Learning (the first two levels) might be stated as follows:

1. To describe the meaning of each of the levels
2. To be able to list the guidelines for each level
3. To be able to create a sample form for measuring Reaction
4. To be able to design a test for evaluating Learning
5. To have a desire for implementing one or more of the levels back on the job

You will note that all of these can be accomplished in the training program.

The objectives for Behavior might be

1. to design a Reaction sheet for one program when you get back on the job
2. to develop a pretest and posttest for evaluating Learning on one program
3. to use the Reaction sheet and tests on the next program you will offer

If the program is designed to reduce turnover of new employees, a Results objective might be “to reduce turnover among new employees to 2 percent or less beginning December 1.”

3. Schedule the program at the right time.

At a recent program I conducted in Racine, Wisconsin, I (Don) was asked to teach five 3.5-hour sessions in a weeklong program. In order to do it for all three shifts, I needed to repeat the program each day. The schedule they gave me was to teach the first session from 7:00 to 10:30 A.M. and repeat it from 3:00 to 6:30 P.M. each day. I lived in Milwaukee, about two hours away. It was too far to go home between sessions, and I had trouble finding something to do each day from 10:30 A.M. until 3:00 P.M. This was the worst schedule I ever had in conducting programs. The problem was that they set the schedule and didn't ask me what schedule I would prefer. I would have told them 8:30–noon and 1:00–4:30. And why didn't they ask me? Because my preferred schedule wouldn't meet their need of having the programs at a time convenient for those attending and their bosses sparing them. And this is the way it should be—that programs are scheduled to meet the convenience and needs of the participants and their bosses and not the instructors. If the participants are attending at a bad time as far as they are concerned, their attitude toward the entire program might be negative.

4. Hold the program at the right place with the right amenities.

Some organizations have their own appropriate facilities. Others need to hold their programs in another location. This is a very impor-

tant decision because the time and attitudes of the participants must be considered. Travel time must be considered. If the program is going to run for a week, the amount of travel time might not be important. But if it is a program lasting three hours or less, the meeting should be scheduled close to “home.” Otherwise, complaining and negative attitudes can result.

I (Don) had a recent experience at a large company in Minneapolis. I was part of a consulting team that did a Leadership program at the home base. I taught one day on “Managing Change.” The participants came from all over the country to attend the one-week program.

At the program opening and every day after, food was provided. In the morning, it included cold cereal, English muffins, toast, bagels, fruit, muffins, coffee, decaf, and tea. During the morning break, the supplies were replenished. For lunch, each participant went through the cafeteria and took whatever he or she wished. During the afternoon break, cookies, fruit, coffee, decaf, and cold soft drinks were provided. The participants were on an expense account for evening meals.

The company then made a decision in order to reduce costs. Instead of participants going to Minneapolis, the consulting team went to the locations of the participants. I remember going to Seattle to teach my one day. At the start of the program, no food or drinks were provided, and some of the smarter ones brought their own coffee. At the morning break, the participants were reminded where the vending machines were located. The participants were on their own for lunch, and no refreshments were provided at the afternoon break. This was an obvious attempt to set an example of saving costs.

Was it worth it? There were some participants who had talked with those who attended the program in Minneapolis, where they got the “royal treatment.” Possibly, some of them left the program with negative attitudes about the way they were treated, which may have resulted in negative attitudes toward the training department, the program itself, and even a desire to apply what was taught.

5. Invite the right people to attend.

Who are the right people, and how many can be handled effectively?

The “right people” are those whose needs are met in the program content. Each instructor must decide, “Can I mix levels of employees and have supervisors attend with higher level managers?” The answer lies in the culture of the organization and the attitudes subordinates and bosses have toward each other. In some cases, subordinates would be afraid to speak up because higher level managers are in attendance. On the other hand, some organizations have “families” of levels attending together because they work together on the job.

Another decision must be the size of the group. The answer to this is based on the size of the organization, the size of the facilities, the type of program (presentation or workshop), the cost, and the skill of the leader as trainer and/or facilitator. Some organizations limit attendance to fifteen participants, while others permit 100 or more to attend.

6. Select effective instructors.

This is probably the most important decision. The qualifications should be the same whether or not the instructor is an inside person or hired from the outside. Obvious qualifications are knowledge of the subject and the ability to communicate effectively. Other necessary qualifications are desire to teach, knowledge of the group, skill in facilitating discussion if a workshop, and ability to establish rapport with the group. If an outside person is selected, cost becomes an important factor.

The best way to decide on an instructor is to see the person in action. This is particularly true if you hire an outside speaker or consultant. When I (Don, again) was in charge of daytime seminars for executives at the Management Institute of the University of Wisconsin, we had a standard of 4.7 out of 5 points on our Reaction sheets. This was a high standard, and we usually lived up to it by carefully selecting leaders. There was one executive from GE who was giving presentations all over the United States. I thought that he must be effective or he wouldn't get so many bookings, so I hired him to conduct a full-day seminar for top executives. I oriented him about the group and agreed with his subject. He would present the program on a Thursday for presidents and vice presidents. On Friday, he would do it for middle-level managers.

I almost wanted to crawl under a chair because he read most of his material and concentrated on the theory and philosophy of GE. It was too late to get him to change, and I doubt if I would have been

successful. His ratings both days were 3.4 on a 5 scale and the Reaction sheets were anything but complimentary.

After the second day, he said,

Don, I notice that you have the participants fill out Reaction sheets. I would like to have you send me a copy because I am always interested in any ideas that I can use to make my presentations more effective. Also, Don, I know that you coordinate many programs. Would you write me a letter and offer any suggestions you have for making my presentations more effective?

I took him at his word and wrote a very tactful letter offering four suggestions:

1. Do not read so much, and maintain eye contact with the group.
2. Use more examples from GE and other organizations.
3. Involve the group by asking them questions to challenge them or having them ask you questions.
4. Prepare handouts for the participants so they won't have to take so many notes. I told him that any program coordinator would be happy to reproduce them for the participants.

This took place in 1979, and I am still waiting for a thank you note. But I did hear in a roundabout way that he told someone that I had written a "nasty" letter and that he would never again participate in a University of Wisconsin program. How right he was! I would certainly never invite him back.

This suggests that when using outside consultants or speakers, be sure that they will be effective. The best way, of course, is to hear them personally. Most of the consulting and speaking work that I do is based on someone actually being at one of my programs. If you can't hear them personally, get recommendations from someone you trust who has seen and heard the person present or lead a workshop. An alternative is to watch them on a DVD of a presentation or workshop.

Using Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) is a common practice these days, and a "best practice" when these experts are properly qualified and trained to deliver training content in an expert manner. Do not assume

that because they are content experts, they are also expert trainers. Effective Train the Trainer programs are usually a great investment.

We have one more suggestion. When you as the program coordinator invite speakers or instructors, tell them ahead of time about the Reaction sheets and the standard you expect them to meet. (This assumes that you have established standards for your programs, which we hope you have!) Many times, they will ask for help in preparing for the session because they want to meet or exceed the standard. Then they won't be surprised (or shocked) when they see the Reaction sheets and know whether or not they met the standard.

7. Use effective techniques and aids.

Each trainer or facilitator has his or her own approaches and illustrations. Regarding aids, there are three main criteria to consider:

- a. What will help in communicating to the group?
- b. What will help get and control participation?
- c. What will help get and maintain the attention and interest of the participants?

The answer to “a” may include handouts, Microsoft PowerPoint slides, overhead projector transparencies, and/or a flip chart or white board. If the group is large, a microphone may also be needed. My (Don) own personal preferences are overhead projector transparencies, handouts, and a flip chart. I often get teased or criticized for being “behind the times” with my transparencies, but I am comfortable with that method and some participants welcome this aid rather than the PowerPoint slides that they are tired of seeing. If I need a microphone, I like a lavalier mike so I can move around easily. This is part of my approach to teaching—the PIE approach—Practical, Interactive, and Enjoyable. If you decide to use PowerPoint, be sure that it is not boring to the participants and contributing to “death by PowerPoint.”

8. Accomplish the program objectives.

Requirement number 2 stated, “Set learning objectives.” It is an obvious requirement that those objectives be accomplished.

9. Satisfy the participants.

The learning objectives established by the trainers might be accomplished to their satisfaction, but the participants (your customers) may be disappointed with the program. This is where Reaction sheets are important to measure the satisfaction of the participants. When they go back to their jobs, you should be certain that they will be saying positive things about the program. If not, word may get to higher management that the participants say that “the program was a waste of time” or something similar. And this may be all the “evidence” they need to determine that the program was not effective.

10. Evaluate the program.

Even though we have listed it last, plans for evaluation should be drawn up before the program is offered. Reaction sheets should be prepared and ready to use. Decisions should be made as to whether to evaluate Learning and for what programs. If a decision is made to evaluate, a pretest may be needed to administer to the participants before the program begins.

To measure Behavior and Results, forms and techniques are typically not needed until some time (three months?) after the program is over. But decisions should be made sooner than that regarding what programs are going to be evaluated at levels 3 and 4. Also, if managers are going to be involved, efforts should be made to contact them in advance to get them to cooperate.

Summary

Before beginning the evaluation process, be sure you are delivering quality programs. So, consider the requirements listed above to be sure the program is effective.

Then determine how much skill, time, and budget can be devoted to evaluation.

Then consider which programs are the most important to evaluate.

Combine the resources with the programs you consider most important to evaluate, and make the final decisions on what programs should be evaluated and at what levels.

The minimum you should do for all programs is level 1. All this requires is a Reaction (smile) sheet that should be administered at an “instructor-led” program or online for an “e-learning” program.

Chapter 3 gives a number of suggestions of forms and approaches that you can borrow and/or adapt.

Level 2 may require a pretest and posttest approach. Before deciding on what resources you need, carefully read Chapter 4 to see if you can find forms and procedures that you can borrow or adapt.

Then, if necessary, you may be able to find some person in Human Resources or another department who is qualified to develop an appropriate test.

In order to determine what resources you need to evaluate levels 3 and 4, read Chapters 5 and 6 and look for forms and techniques you can borrow. Then determine what additional help is needed.

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