

A stylized tree graphic with a thick, olive-green trunk and branches that curve upwards and outwards. The leaves are represented by various shades of green, from light to dark, creating a layered, organic look. The background is a solid dark green. A light blue horizontal bar is positioned near the top of the page.

ATD Training Basics Series

2nd Edition

Performance
BASICS

Joe Willmore

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2nd Edition

Performance

BASICS

Joe Willmore

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About the Training Basics Series

ATD's Training Basics series recognizes and, in some ways, celebrates the fast-paced, ever-changing reality of organizations today. Jobs, roles, and expectations change quickly. One day you might be a network administrator or a process-line manager, and the next day you might be asked to train 50 employees in basic computer skills or to instruct line workers in quality processes.

Where do you turn for help? The ATD Training Basics series is designed to be your one-stop solution. The series takes a minimalist approach to your learning curve dilemma and presents only the information you need to be successful. Each book in the series guides you through key aspects of training: giving presentations, making the transition to the role of trainer, designing and delivering training, and evaluating training. The books in the series also include some advanced skills, such as performance and basic business proficiencies.

The ATD Training Basics series is the perfect tool for training and performance professionals looking for easy-to-understand materials that will prepare nontrainers to take on a training role. In addition, this series is the consummate reference tool for any trainer's bookshelf and a quick way to hone your existing skills.

Preface

When a new edition of a book is published, it's natural to ask what's different about it. What does this edition have that the prior edition didn't? For starters, I have more than a decade of additional experience with a range of new clients from around the globe. So I have some new insights and stories to share regarding performance. As a result, I've added more practical examples involving my personal experience with performance work. But the second edition includes more than just stories about my experience.

Specifically, there are content areas in the book that have undergone some big changes. The section on analysis was originally written before the ATD Analysis DNA tools had been fully developed, so that section has a lot of new content, including comments and examples involving some of the DNA tools ATD uses in its Human Performance Improvement (HPI) Certificate Program. There have also been many changes in root cause analysis, so the update includes comments on influence. During the past decade or so, ATD has changed substantially, and the HPI program has changed with it. For instance, when the first edition was written, there was no Master Performance Consultant Program. This edition reflects those changes and has been intentionally written to be consistent with and complementary to the ATD HPI and Master Performance Consultant Programs. That's important because this book was originally written to be a resource for those thinking about taking the HPI program or individuals who wanted a refresher between classes or after they received their HPI certificate. This edition has been adapted to keep pace with the changes in those programs, so that the book can still be used as a resource.

Since the publication of the first edition, a number of excellent performance books have been published, which are included in the references and additional resources sections. And finally, I've sought to add more tools and specific examples to this book to help illustrate some of the concepts and principles within the content.

Whether you call it HPI, HPT, or performance consulting, the approach in this book provides a proven method to get better results and generate organizational improvement. With organizations placing greater emphasis on results and accountability, having knowledge of performance is critical. You'll find this book to be a useful tool.

Who Should Read This Book?

You've probably heard from managers or peers (or by reading ATD research reports on trends in the industry) that the argument to focus on performance is strong and pervasive. Simply put, organizations throughout the world are focusing on results. Trainers are being held accountable by managers for organizational results. They must be able to show their value on the organization's bottom line. The emphasis on performance is not going away any time soon. So if you're trying to find more information about performance improvement, how it applies to you, and how you can start applying it to your work, this book is for you.

Performance Basics is specifically written for people who have little or no formal background in performance consulting, are just getting started in the field, or need to find more information about what it involves. There is little emphasis on theory, models, or historical background. The focus is on the practical application of performance improvement. Additionally, this book is designed to be consistent in approach, terminology, and content with ATD's HPI Certificate Program.

How This Book Is Organized

Chapter 1, "The Big Picture: Why Focus on Performance Improvement?" shows you why performance is important and how to get started in performance consulting.

Chapter 2, "What Is Performance Consulting?" defines performance consulting and shows how it's different from training, organization development, facilitation, and quality improvement. You will also discover the types of competencies and skills valuable to performance consultants.

Chapter 3, "Human Performance Improvement Is Business Focused," explains front-end analysis and defines the term *business focus* in terms of performance. It also shows you how to be a more effective performance consultant through partnering.

Chapter 4, "Performance Consulting Focuses on Accomplishments," shares how to distinguish between accomplishments and behaviors and use accomplishments to assess performance gaps.

Chapter 5, "Performance Consulting Finds the Root Cause," explores why root cause analysis is so important for effective performance consulting work and the tools to help you conduct it.

Chapter 6, “Performance Consulting Does Not Jump to Conclusions,” shows you how to use data collection and analysis effectively and discuss performance issues with clients.

Chapter 7, “Performance Consulting Solves Problems,” points you in the right direction for choosing and designing the appropriate solution and implementing effective change management strategies for generating cooperation with those solutions.

Chapter 8, “Evaluating Results: The Real Test of Performance,” explains how to conduct formative, summative, and return on investment (ROI) analysis.

Chapter 9, “Putting It All Together,” illustrates how to improve your performance consulting skills and explain performance consulting to clients.

Each chapter opens with a quick access guide—What’s Inside This Chapter—to introduce you to the contents of the chapter. Use this section to identify the information it contains and, if you wish, skip ahead to the material most useful to you.

The final section of each chapter—Getting It Done—offers you a chance to practice some of the concepts discussed in the chapter and provides closing tips and pointers to help you apply what you have learned.

This book strives to make it as easy as possible for you to understand and apply its lessons. Icons throughout the book help you identify key points to retain.



Basic Rules

These rules cut to the chase. They are unequivocal and important concepts for trainers (or performance consultants).



Noted

This icon is used to give you more detail or explanation about a concept or a principle. It is also occasionally used for a short but productive tangent.



Think About This

These are helpful tips to help you prepare for future conversations with performers.

Acknowledgments

There are many people I’m grateful to for this second edition. There are several performance professionals who have made a significant contribution to my work and are also great people. To Dana Gaines Robinson, George Piskurich, and Paul Elliott, thank you for all of the conversations, advice,

Preface

and wisdom you've provided. Also, the late Geary Rummier, whom I served with on the board of directors for ATD. Geary was a giant in the field and was a great resource for me. To the publishing staff at ATD, thanks for being a joy to work with and facilitating this second edition. And last of all, I thank my wife, Cathy, who makes this all possible with her support and understanding.

1

The Big Picture: Why Focus on Performance Improvement?



What's Inside This Chapter

This chapter illustrates the importance of performance and how to get started in performance consulting. You will learn to:

- Identify implications of the performance improvement movement for trainers and others in the human resource development (HRD) field.
- Get started in performance consulting.
- Understand the emphasis placed on performance.
- Navigate this book and its structure to find specific information.

1

The Big Picture: Why Focus on Performance Improvement?

How Performance Basics Can Help You

You've probably heard from a range of sources that the training profession is focusing more on performance. Perhaps senior management has started to put pressure on your training department to "quantify the impact" of the training you do or to demonstrate the "return on the company's investment." Maybe you believe the training you provide is valuable, but you would like it to have even more impact on your organization. Or it's possible you've been told by senior management that you're going to start doing performance consulting. Even if none of these scenarios is true for you, you've probably been told that there is a need to show results to justify budgets—departments are being held more accountable for producing some form of impact. As a result, performance improvement is becoming expected of more training and HR professionals. In any case, this book will help you.

There are many misconceptions regarding performance improvement. When you hear that the human development field is becoming more performance focused, it is only natural to question the permanence of this focus shift. Perhaps you or your organization has already decided that you're going to become a performance consultant. Whether you intend to do performance consulting, performance improvement is an area that is crucial for you to understand. It's also one that isn't that difficult to get started in. Performance improvement is responsible for sweeping changes in the training and development profession. Anyone who wants to be a professional trainer needs to understand the ins and outs of HPI and the implications for the training profession. This is true for more than just trainers; human resource and organization development (OD) professionals are facing more pressure to show results and be accountable for enhancing performance.

Maybe you've already noticed the trend toward performance in your profession. ATD—the world's largest association dedicated to those who develop talent in organizations—has certainly concluded that a shift to performance is a key trend in today's workplace. Research findings by other organizations match ATD's conclusions. This increasing emphasis on performance only mirrors what is going on elsewhere in the world.



Performance consultants aren't the only ones who can benefit from studying HPI. Even if you know you won't be in a performance consulting role, being knowledgeable about this field can help you do your current job better. If you're aware of the factors responsible for the performance gap, you're better able to determine if what you provide will make a difference.

Starting in the mid-1980s, there was a shift within the field of education in the United States to an increased emphasis on performance (and thus the use of testing to evaluate and establish accountability). Performance-based budgeting and accountability are increasing trends within government. Almost all professional fields are placing a greater emphasis and accountability on performance.

This push for performance accountability is not a recent phenomenon. The human performance improvement field has been around professionally as a recognized area of study for decades, and the basic roots of this field go back even further (Sanders and Ruggles 2000). In short, the focus on performance is not a fad; it will become more pervasive. Organizations and senior management are asking for human development professionals to be more accountable for performance results, and the training profession is becoming more performance focused. So, trainers who aren't performance savvy will find themselves out of step with their profession, their clients, their management, and their organization.



ATD has consistently found that increased emphasis on performance is one of the top trends relevant to training and development professionals.

Why is the emphasis on performance and results increasing? Part of this is due to accountability and resources—the need to show results that matter to key business goals. This is a challenge for all areas of an organization, from IT to operations to HRD. Additionally, time pressure is a factor. In some cases, there simply isn't time to provide training to an entire dispersed workforce; instead, using nontraining options, such as job aids, end up being significantly faster. But there is a specific reason why training and development professionals are facing this challenge. The simple answer is that most human performance issues can't be solved by training. Training addresses performance gaps caused by a lack of skill or knowledge, but training cannot improve motivation; change job designs, work flow, or organizational structure; or solve a host of other factors.

Research tells us that more than 80 percent of the time, performance problems aren't caused by the performer's lack of skills or knowledge. Training specialist Billy Ballard noted in 2015 that “commonly accepted models of human performance show that training accounts for only about 10-15 percent of employee performance. It's reasonable to conclude then that training will address only a small fraction of work performance problems” (Ballard 2015). Studies by Edward Deming, Paul Elliott, Joe Harless, and others have repeatedly shown that while there are a variety of causes for poor results by performers, training doesn't solve the majority of them. This is also true when we look at research involving specific sectors or industries. For instance, one study of healthcare found that only 13 percent of performance failures were due to human error or lack of skills or knowledge (Tucker, Heisler, and Jannise 2013). And training expert Jeff Toister noted that “training is a 1 percent solution for improving customer service” (Toister 2014).

In its 2015 “Catalogue of Catastrophe,” the International Project Leadership Academy listed its 101 most common causes of project failure, only five of which could be addressed by training. The “Dirty Dozen,” a list of the 12 most common causes of human errors or precursors to accidents or incidents, was first established in 1993 and has been continually revised and updated since then. However, only one of the 12 causes is solvable by training. When asked to self-assess individual performance gaps, very few performers identify a lack of skills or knowledge as the primary barrier to improving their performance (Dean, Dean, and Rebalsky 1996). This study has been replicated numerous times; I've even used it as an introductory activity at conferences to introduce performance concepts. The results are consistent—when people are asked to identify their barriers to improved performance, very few indicate a lack of training or insufficient knowledge and skills.

In short, a wide variety of research findings show that training isn't the solution to most performance gaps, because the vast majority of poor performance is not due to poor skills or lack of knowledge; it's a result of other causes such as process problems, motivation, incentive issues, resources, unclear standards, or confusing feedback. Training addresses a lack of knowledge or skills but not other areas, which means training won't solve the vast majority of human performance problems at work.

 **Noted**

Joe Harless, one of the leaders and practitioners of performance improvement, found that out of 200 analyses conducted across a wide range of organizations to determine the cause and the solution for performance gaps, the most frequent cause was the lack of adequate feedback. The most infrequent cause of poor performance was lack of skills or knowledge. Training won't solve most performance issues at work.

This is not meant to diminish the value of training. Training can be an effective way to boost performance—but only for a limited number of issues. Training as a generic fix for performance problems will not necessarily fix those problems.

This is a critical concept for you to master as a trainer, OD practitioner, or any other profession in the human development field. Poor performance can be due to any number of factors, but many organizations continue to throw training at all or most performance issues. This inappropriate reliance upon training is a losing proposition for everyone concerned: It wastes vital organizational resources, builds a bad reputation for the training department (because the problems you're told to solve don't go away), and increases cynicism within the workforce.

 **Basic Rule 1**

Although organizations tend to rely upon training as a one-size-fits-every-problem answer, it is usually not the solution to a performance gap. Nevertheless, trainers may be held accountable for the results of inappropriate training programs.

As a trainer, you won't be able to help your organization with the vast majority of performance gaps, thus minimizing your value. In addition, the organization is likely to ask you to solve many performance issues that can't be solved because of the aforementioned reasons. Though you know your impact may be minimal within the organization, you will still be held accountable for the results. This is clearly a no-win situation: Trainers are asked to solve problems with training that are not covered in the scope of training's capabilities. Faced with such a situation, you can say no to the majority of client requests. The other option is to improve your ability to understand performance gaps and how to solve them when they don't involve training issues.



Think About This

Because of increasing emphasis on performance within organizations, more people in our profession have begun calling themselves performance consultants, although they continue to operate as before. Performance consulting involves some fundamental changes in the way performance issues are approached with clients. It's not enough to just change your job title.

Taking a more performance-based approach to your instructional design and training will result in better training. You will be less likely to take on training requests that will fail because the solution doesn't involve knowledge or skills. Your training will be more focused and more likely to be successful.

Becoming more performance focused in your work shouldn't happen just because management is pressuring training to move in that direction or because of professional trends. Whether management supports training or not, there is a compelling case for you to become more performance focused in your work approach. Being performance focused means being significantly more effective in whatever you do. It also means that you spend more time and resources on issues that are mission critical to the organization, and thus have a much higher return. You're also much more successful with the work you take on. Being more knowledgeable about performance positions you to provide other solutions besides training to get better results. It allows you to do a better job of identifying situations in which training will be successful (and avoiding situations in which it won't be). And it will allow you to identify what other non-training programs need to be implemented to support your training so it can be successful. Consequently, when you do provide training, it has a great chance of being successful. As a result,

you're seen as invaluable to the organization. After all, you want to be appreciated for the work you do. In short, being performance focused means making more of a difference in your work.

 **Noted**

Some organizations have decided to get into the performance consulting field by announcing to their clients that this is what they do and then sending the staff identified as future performance consultants to some type of training. Being an effective performance consultant means more than just acquiring some new skills and knowledge. If you continue to operate as before (with only a change in job title from trainer to performance consultant and some newly acquired skills), then you won't significantly improve performance, and clients will continue to respond to you as a trainer. As a true performance consultant, you will change how you interact with clients in a fundamental way.

Who Can Benefit From This Book?

At this point, you may have already decided that it's critical to know much more about performance consulting. However, if you're still undecided on how this material applies to you, here's an explanation of how an instructional designer, trainer, facilitator, or OD practitioner benefits from knowledge of performance consulting. First, the performance consulting process is a tool for evaluating performance gaps and designing solutions. Even if you're limited in your role to offering only one kind of solution, such as being an instructional designer, delivering stand-up training on specific topics, or creating manuals to support technical training on software, an awareness of performance consulting will improve your ability to do those specific functions.

Additionally, knowledge of performance consulting will help you avoid taking on problems that you can't solve. It is a waste of the organization's resources (and your time) to attempt to solve problems with training that don't involve lack of knowledge or skills; in addition, your clients will eventually come to regard you as a poor trainer because you keep providing training but nothing changes. Even if you can't deviate from the set of solutions assigned to you, such as training or OD, knowledge of performance consulting can increase your success rate by giving you the insight to identify problems that you are capable of addressing. It's in your best interest to be able to target the performance gap and its causes so you can steer your client to a solution that will be more efficacious and will result in a successful outcome.



Noted

You will read and hear the terms *internal practitioner* and *external consultant*. An internal practitioner is someone employed by an organization to serve the employees of that organization. An external consultant is someone whose clients are outside the organization. This book uses language and examples more consistent with internal performance consultants, but the content is equally appropriate for both roles.

Many individuals will benefit from this book. If you simply want to find out more about what performance is and how it works, this book is a good introduction. If you are new to performance consulting, this book will be a good foundation—not heavy on theory but covering all the key concepts and lots of practical information. If you’re a training manager or HR director who is responsible for overseeing the performance function as part of your portfolio, this book will be useful. It can help you understand the performance consulting role, how it fits with the other services your department provides, and some of the issues regarding working together effectively. After all, you can’t just add HPI as another service to your department. If you’re a trainer, instructional designer, facilitator, HR professional, OD practitioner, quality consultant, or line manager who may have to interact with performance consultants, this book is for you. It’s also a useful introduction if you’re planning to take ATD’s Improving Human Performance Certificate Program or the Master Performance Consultant Program.



Think About This

Regardless of your organizational role, being knowledgeable about performance improvement can improve your ability to do your job. It will also allow you to use your resources (staff, time, budget) much more wisely.

What This Book Can Do for You

After you’re finished reading this book, you should understand how performance consultants approach problems, how your individual function can fit within an HPI framework, and how performance consulting is different from how you currently approach problems. If you’re going to be held accountable for results—for actually eliminating performance gaps—this book can help you do that. It will also help you deal with client requests and give you a better sense of how to partner to get work done. You’ll also learn how to be more strategic and less transactional

in your work. To be very clear, this book is not just for people who will be doing performance consulting work. Even if your current role is narrow and limited in focus, an awareness of how to improve performance will allow you to do your work more effectively and help you avoid taking on problems that can't be solved by your area of focus.



Think About This

Some of the most successful performance consultants don't have a reference to performance in their job titles and their clients don't even consider them to be in the performance field. Performance consultants can be successful without having to sell clients on the approach. Oftentimes this makes sense because they don't have to deal with selling clients on a new model, label, or job title, and they never have to explain how it's different from what they used to do.

This book is intended to introduce you to the field of performance improvement. Because it takes a very practical approach, you'll find scant reference to theories, models, or history. However, there are many tools, resources, tips, and examples you can apply.

By the time you're finished reading this book, you'll have a very good understanding of what performance consulting is, how it's relevant to what you do, and how to proceed to build your skills and knowledge.

Getting It Done

This chapter provided you with a quick introduction and explained why performance consulting—regardless of your formal position in the organization—is relevant to you. There are plenty of reasons to become more knowledgeable about performance even if you won't be in a performance consulting role. Exercise 1-1 will help you determine your motivation for embarking on this tour of performance consulting.

Exercise 1-1. Getting Set for Tackling the Rest of the Book

Here are some additional questions to consider that will prepare you for the rest of this book:

1. Identify some examples of requests you received from clients for specific solutions, such as an order from management to provide listening skills training for the sales force or a team-building session for a group of managers, in which the solution wasn't

going to solve the problem. These are examples in which a performance-focused approach would have avoided wasted resources by the organization.

2. Think of how your role may have changed during the past several years. What is expected from this position now as opposed to the past? In what ways do you expect your role to change in the future? By identifying how your role may be in transition, you can determine what aspects of performance consulting may be more relevant to your role or may be worth a greater focus on your part.
3. What examples do you see within your organization or with your clients that show increased accountability for performance or pressure to demonstrate results? In what ways has your organization changed how the solutions you provide are evaluated: Is there more pressure to demonstrate return on investment (ROI) or show changes in business numbers because of your work? Is there more pressure on your training budget? These are forces within the organization that are driving more of a performance focus.
4. In what way have your clients' expectations changed? What is different in terms of the results they want, how they want the work done, the pressure they face, or the process they want to use? As clients face more pressure to demonstrate results, that pressure is likely passed on to you (with more emphasis on quick results, justifying budget, or proving a clear value to the organization).

Answering the questions in the exercise should have helped you identify what aspects of performance consulting are especially relevant for you, the availability of performance consulting work that is applicable to your current clients, and possible ways to sell performance consulting to your clients or manager by connecting it to their immediate priorities.

The next chapter will provide you with an introduction to performance consulting and the key competencies and roles for effective performance consulting work. By the end of chapter 2, you'll have a good sense of what it means to be a performance consultant and how that work compares with what you currently do.

