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To be successful, we talent professionals must approach our role more like our stakeholders approach theirs,” Jenny Dearborn, senior vice president and chief learning officer at SAP, writes in Elaine Biech’s ATD’s Foundations of Talent Development: Launching, Leveraging, and Leading Your Organization’s TD Effort. The stakeholders who want our services and solutions, however, may not always be right.

That is to say, the stakeholders may not understand the underlying root cause of the business challenge. Or they may want outcomes that aren’t necessarily tied to strategic organizational priorities.

Dearborn continues, “To be a strategic partner, we must bring strategic ideas to the table; this means mastering our business domain, and not just our silo. After all, talent development is not an end in and of itself, but rather a means to make our organizations successful.”

Where do we begin? This TD at Work collection provides critical insight, tools, and resources that can help.

In the first issue of this collection, “Turning Trainers Into Strategic Business Partners,” Ingrid Guerra-López and Karen Hicks outline necessary ways of thinking for today’s talent development professional, namely system thinking, strategic thinking, and critical thinking. The authors then outline the steps to align TD solutions to strategic objectives.

Alec Levenson writes in “Measuring and Maximizing the Impact of Talent Development” that “Individual performance depends on a lot more than individual competencies: It requires the right motivation and job design. And looking at performance one person or role at a time (as in traditional talent management) loses sight of how organization design and culture, along with business and HR processes, combine to produce the results.” Levenson offers ways to use a systems approach—for example, by identifying learning opportunities to build and reinforce organizational capability and aligning rewards and performance at the group level.

What learning initiatives do you plan to prioritize next year? Will you have the resources to carry out the programs? In “Preparing and Defending Your Training Budget,” Lianabel Oliver Bigas provides readers with an overview of the organizational planning process and the effects on the TD professional’s role. She provides questions to ask to help determine the training operating environment, such as internal clients, available technologies, and economic factors affecting the labor pool. Understanding your organization and the environment will help you better position yourself as a strategic player.

“Business Acumen Basics for Talent Development,” written by Robert S. Brodo, lays the foundation for the final three issues of this TD at Work collection. In his issue, Brodo helps readers learn what they need to understand about the organizational landscape. What is your organization’s value equation? Taking it one step further, Brodo writes, “Your organization controls the value dashboard you offer to customers.” Grasping these data will provide TD professionals with important information to engage with stakeholders in business dialogues.

From value dashboards to executive dashboards, “When designing an executive L&D dashboard,” Preethi Anand writes in “Executive Dashboards to Win Over the C-Suite,” “instead of writing the objectives of having a dashboard, you should start with the outcomes in mind.” Anand explains how to design a prototype dashboard, test it, and present it so that the audience will clearly be able to absorb what it is you need them to see. To assist, the author provides an audience analysis sheet that will help you fine-tune data and presentation.

In “Fuel Business Strategies With L&D Analytics,” the final issue of TD at Work in our collection, Gene Pease and Caroline Brant guide readers to the new world of data and metrics—information TD professionals have that they haven’t had before (such as predictive analytics). Pease and Brant write, “You don’t need to become an expert in data analysis, but without a basic understanding and the ability to communicate results, the L&D function’s reputation for being a ‘budgetary spend’ will never change.”

Results. Recognition of budgetary and time constraints. Comprehension of organizational effectiveness. Those are just a few of the aptitudes TD professionals need today. Read on to learn more.