

Research Results

Industry

Training and Development

Organization

A top provider of leading-edge online professional education programs for teachers and administrators.

Background

A six-member design team, working in partnership with the software development team, creates online learning courses. The designers work on multiple projects, all characterized by uncertainty, complexity, and ever-changing requirements. To ensure project success, and as part of an ongoing effort to build a performance culture, the senior leadership team sought assistance from Avid Learner, Inc. The primary goals were to accelerate productivity by improving communication and collaboration between the teams, and promoting team member engagement, initiative, ownership and accountability.

Solution Design

An Avid Learner consultant:

- Met with members of the team to provide an overview of the program
- Delivered three sessions of the How to Be a Star at Work[®] program, followed by a one-week intersession, and then delivered the three additional sessions
- Provided team members with personalized coaching on their development plans
- Conducted a Progress Review Session 2 months after the training
- Administered evaluations 4 months after the training



Evaluation Process

Four months after completion of the training program, participants completed a retrospective self-assessment on behaviors and work strategies identified as important by the senior leadership team. The assessment included the following measures:

- Seven items related to **awareness** of opportunities to use the new work strategies
- Thirty-six items related to **effectiveness** in using the new work strategies BEFORE and AFTER participating in the How to be a Star at Work[®] training program
- Thirteen items regarding the extent to which the work **environment** supported learning and development.

At the same time, managers and colleagues of the participants completed a similar retrospective assessment with measures of **effectiveness** on 30 behaviors and work strategies, including an opportunity to provide each participant with written feedback on their performance.

Results and Conclusions

1. Participants saw an increase in opportunities to use the new behaviors and work strategies after completion of the program.

Figure 1.

Percentage of Respondents Who Recognize More Opportunities to Use the Work Strategies

Initiative	80%
Followership	80%
Perspective	60%
Teamwork	60%
Self-Management	20%
Leadership	80%
Networking	80%



2. *Managers reported dramatic increases in participant productivity.*

As a basis for evaluation, managers selected 30 items from a list of factors that most influenced their judgment of an employee’s personal productivity. At least two managers, and often a third, evaluated the productivity of each participant using a retrospective evaluation. **Performance improved in all areas**, and ten representative items are highlighted in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. Retrospective Evaluation by Management Team

	AVE. BEFORE RATING	AVE. AFTER RATING	CHANGE
1. Makes important technical contributions that have measurable impact.	2.78	4.65	67.4%
2. Has a network of experts that includes people with varying and informed perspectives.	1.60	2.75	71.9%
3. Takes advantage of opportunities to solve problems or improve processes, doing so without being asked.	2.25	3.67	63.0%
4. Exercises sound judgment when setting priorities and determining best methods for completing assignments.	2.44	3.56	45.5%
5. Completes assignments on time and to specification.	2.90	3.95	36.2%
6. Informs me, as appropriate, about the status of situations and progress of key assignments in a timely fashion.	2.33	3.73	59.7%
7. Helps the team and me see both the positive potential and	1.88	3.44	83.7%
8. Proactively contributes original or innovative suggestions and ideas.	2.00	3.78	88.9%
9. Consistently delights and exceeds the expectations of customers.	2.89	3.72	28.8%
10. Invites, values and builds upon the ideas and input of others.	2.56	3.89	52.2%



3. Feedback from colleagues and managers documented substantial changes in performance.

Managers and colleagues were invited to provide each participant with specific written feedback. The following comments represent some of the most common observations:

Figure 3. Manager and Colleague Evaluations

“Jeff continues to amaze me in his technical graphic talent. He has made huge gains since (completing the training), and is starting to feel like another one of the solid team members, not the “new guy.”

“Trisha has made significant gains since (completing the training), but I feel there is much more in store. The hurdle of technical issues that she had previous to (her participation in the training) has since been repaired, mostly due to her changing of perspective and attitude, which has been quite refreshing. Now she can expand her horizons to more of the “white space,” which is where I see the majority of her gains surfacing. If this shift (into organizational white-space contribution) is anywhere as easy as it was for her to complete her technical shift, she will be contributing a great amount in a short amount of time. Nice job.”

“John has been phenomenal over the time since (completing the training). 95% of the issues that he had coming into the training have since been fixed. All that remains is the shadow of one of those issues, and he is making long strides to completely eliminate this burden as well. This remaining issue lies in positive expectancy in the face of adversity and stress. Though it still lingers, it has much improved since our original assessments. Overall, he has become an invaluable team member, the strongest contributor technically, and, with the exception of very few moments, an exemplary follower and leader when needed. I’m very pleased.”

“He has changed. His countenance since (completing the training) has been exemplary. His recent change has made a big difference in his co-workers. The tension in the air is gone and his good attitude lifts others spirits. Productivity is up and I know part of that goes directly to his new positive influence on the team.

“He has made great gains from being alienated to being more exemplary. I’m not sure what exactly “clicked” for him. He is communicating better, making more contributions, and gaining even more respect because of it.”

“I sense Alan is hitting his stride...when everything starts coming together and he is seeing the results. In the above evaluation, I tagged many of the after categories at “4” but many of these are at the tipping point of becoming “5’s”. That is how well he is doing.”

“Emmett has made some huge gains over the past few months. His team contributions have increased dramatically. He is very productive and is dedicated to his job. He has a very high level of contribution when it comes to keeping things on task and keeping everything moving forward. I’m increasingly confident.”



4. *Participants performed critical behaviors and work strategies more effectively following participation in the training program.*

Performance improved in all areas targeted for development, but most noticeably in taking initiative, building knowledge networks and broadening perspective. Effectiveness improved substantially on 10 behaviors—from an average rating at or below 2.50 (generally ineffective) to an average rating at or above 3.50 (generally effective). The most significant of these is Item 10—“I regularly evaluate my outputs and work assignments to be sure they match up with my understanding of the critical path—work that ensures achievement of our most critical objectives.”

Figure 4. Participant Retrospective Self-Evaluations

1	2	3	4	5
Almost Always Ineffective	Usually Ineffective	Sometimes Effective	Usually Effective	Almost Always Effective

	AVE. BEFORE RATING	AVE. AFTER RATING	CHANGE
1. I actively participate in formal and informal learning activities in a way that makes the most of each learning experience.	3.00	4.00	33%
2. When I acquire new knowledge, skill or understanding, I look for ways to apply what I've learned to my job.	3.60	4.60	28%
3. I ask my managers and colleagues for feedback about my performance, and I act on their suggestions.	2.40	3.80	58%
4. I routinely look for gaps in my own technical knowledge, and build relationships with people who provide me with relevant and timely information.	2.60	4.20	62%
5. I seek to include people in my network who can broaden my understanding of internal or external customers, stakeholders, and other parts of the company.	2.00	3.80	90%
6. I seek to include people in my network with varying and informed perspectives about the work I do.	2.20	3.80	73%
7. I let others know I am available as a resource, willing to share information and my own expertise.	3.00	4.60	53%
8. I provide people in my network with information or material that I think might interest them.	2.60	4.00	54%



1	2	3	4	5
Almost Always Ineffective	Usually Ineffective	Sometimes Effective	Usually Effective	Almost Always Effective

	AVE. BEFORE RATING	AVE. AFTER RATING	CHANGE
9. I look for problems and opportunities to improve processes, and I fix them without being asked to do so.	2.00	3.60	80%
10. I regularly evaluate my outputs and work assignments to be sure they match up with my understanding of the critical path—work that ensures achievement of our most critical objectives.	2.00	4.20	110%
11. I gain support for my own ideas by articulating the goals, quantifying the benefits and risks, seeking feedback and input, building support, showing how my idea supports or helps accomplish organizational priorities, etc.	2.20	3.20	45%
12. I pursue situations that can have significant negative consequences if I believe there is also an opportunity to realize a substantial advantage.	2.20	3.60	64%
13. I give credit to colleagues for their contributions and help.	4.20	5.00	19%
14. I optimize my time and organize my workspace in such a way that allows me to do my best work.	3.40	4.40	29%
15. I apply relevant decision criteria and exercise sound judgment when setting priorities.	3.20	4.20	31%
16. My project management system alerts me to potential crises, includes contingency plans, and helps me communicate progress and results to others.	2.20	3.80	73%
17. I make sure that I fully understand, in advance, the objectives and expectations for a particular project or task.	3.20	4.20	31%
18. If I think an expense estimate or a project timeline is not feasible, I express my concerns to my manager, and provide supporting rationale.	2.60	4.60	77%



1	2	3	4	5
Almost Always Ineffective	Usually Ineffective	Sometimes Effective	Usually Effective	Almost Always Effective

	AVE. BEFORE RATING	AVE. AFTER RATING	CHANGE
19. I regularly review my own productivity and try a new approach if I think it will improve my performance and efficiency.	2.80	4.00	43%
20. I help the leader or group see both the positive potential and the risks of ideas or plans, playing devil's advocate when necessary.	3.00	4.00	33%
21. I inform the leader/team when I believe we are going in the wrong direction.	3.20	4.20	31%
22. I take advantage of opportunities to influence decisions, and I express any views, concerns or differences of opinion in a positive, constructive and appropriate fashion.	3.40	4.20	24%
23. I use my intelligence and proactively contribute suggestions and ideas that are truly original.	3.20	3.80	19%
24. I demonstrate a passion and enthusiasm for my work and my company that is obvious to others.	4.20	4.80	14%
25. I stand up for the ideas, goals, values and principles I believe in, even in the face of resistance.	4.20	4.40	5%
26. When leading, I motivate others by taking the time to build one-to-one relationships, making each person feel valued, appreciated and involved.	3.80	4.40	16%
27. When leading, I create a sense of forward progress by setting expectations, clarifying the goals or technical direction, making process suggestions and monitoring results.	2.60	3.60	38%
28. I monitor trends (e.g., customer, economic, demographic, technological, competitive, legislative) that could affect my performance or productivity.	1.80	3.20	78%
29. I demonstrate a genuine appreciation for the expression of differing viewpoints.	2.40	3.60	50%



1	2	3	4	5
Almost Always Ineffective	Usually Ineffective	Sometimes Effective	Usually Effective	Almost Always Effective

	AVE. BEFORE RATING	AVE. AFTER RATING	CHANGE
30. I clearly understand the potential impact of my own work on the progress of other teams, functions, or business units, and I understand the contribution others make to the company.	2.60	4.60	77%
31. I talk with my internal customers in advance to understand their expectations of my work and clarify what I can do for them.	2.40	4.20	75%
32. After I complete an assignment, I check in with my internal customers to find out if my work met their expectations.	3.00	4.00	33%
33. I stay abreast of current developments and trends in my profession/area of expertise.	3.00	3.80	27%
34. I work to make team goals achievable by helping to define the goals and to make sure they are assigned appropriately.	2.40	3.50	46%
35. I contribute wherever needed (even if it's not my job) to get the job done and to demonstrate my feeling of ownership for team goals.	3.80	4.20	11%
36. I commit to the specifications and timelines of my work commitments.	4.20	4.80	14%



4. Personal motivation, creation of individual development plans and management support and coaching help accelerate productivity gains.

Figure 5. Participant Retrospective Self-Evaluations—Learning Environment

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT	AVE. RATING
1. I have discussed what I learned about in the program with my manager.	3.00
2. I reviewed the development goals I wrote in the program with my manager or a trusted colleague.	3.80
3. My manager helped me identify specific opportunities to apply the work strategies I learned about in the program.	3.40
4. I discussed lessons learned, development goals, and/or progress made more than once with my manager since attending the program.	3.60
5. I receive coaching, feedback and reinforcement from my manager or a trusted colleague about my use of the work strategies.	3.20
6. I have provided coaching, feedback and/or reinforcement to a colleague about their use of the work strategies.	4.00
7. Since attending the program, I have revised and/or finalized the development goals I wrote.	4.00
8. I feel motivated to use the work strategies I learned about in the program.	4.40
9. I have accomplished or made substantial progress on at least one of the development goals I set in the program.	4.60



1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree

AVE. RATING

10. My manager encourages and supports personal and professional development.	4.80
11. In my efforts to use what I learned in the training program on the job, I feel like I have the resources and support I need.	4.00
12. The company values and encourages personal and professional development.	4.80
13. I have enough time at work to balance personal development activities with my workload.	2.00

