Full Speed Ahead

How to Close the Gap between Initial Employee Training and Full Proficiency
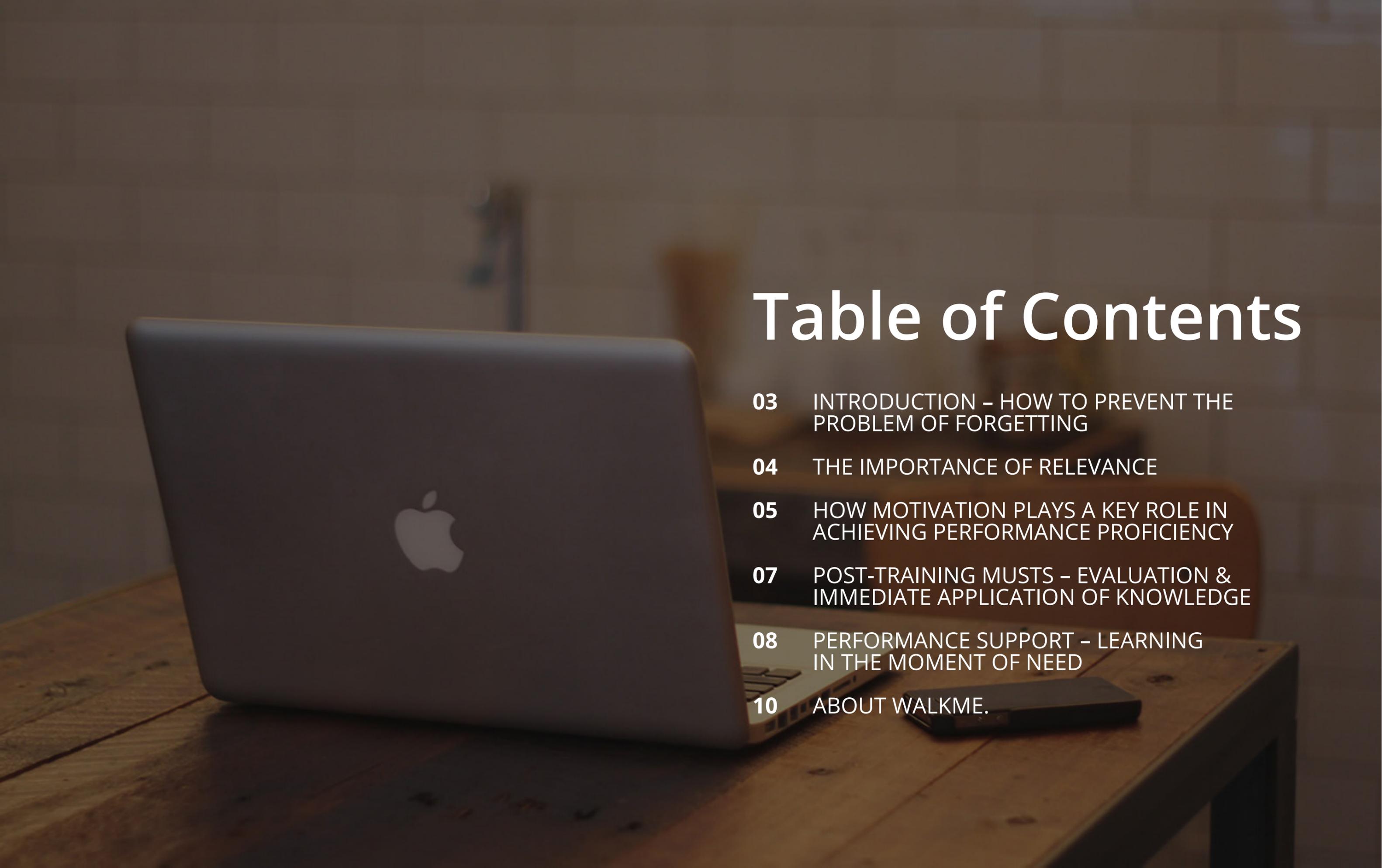
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Introduction – How to Prevent the Problem of Forgetting

The greatest challenge facing employee training managers is that of low knowledge retention -- the amount of knowledge absorbed by the learner during training that helps the worker complete his/her required tasks.

A common scenario familiar to training managers is that of a new employee completing four days of training on the company's CRM software. After the initial training period, the employee's supervisor expects the employee to hit the ground running and begin showing results. Instead, the supervisor is oftentimes frustrated because the employee has forgotten much of what he/she has learned and is unable to immediately apply that knowledge to the actual work.

According to the Association for Talent Development (2015), **learners forget 58% of what they just learned within an hour after training ends.** You can't blame the trainer -- even in the most engaging, innovative, and well-executed training programs, a proficiency gap will still exist.

Even if the employee absorbed and retained 75% of the information, he/she is still liable to make a series of mistakes and repeatedly ask for assistance. The manager will therefore be hesitant to assign full responsibility to the employee and instead, look towards the day the employee will be able to achieve full proficiency on the CRM software.

Experienced "learning and development" leaders recognize that most learning takes place beyond the initial formal learning sessions. Humans have a natural tendency to learn by repetition and practice, not just by knowledge retention.

Whether it is a child learning to ride a bicycle or an adult learning to operate a particular enterprise software, training takes time. The saying is "practice makes perfect," not "hearing makes perfect". Also, people learn in different ways and at different paces. Every learner is different and should be provided with the adequate learning tools to achieve the desired goals.

This white paper examines proven strategies to shorten the gap between the end of training and the point at which the learner reaches full levels of proficiency and independence.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RELEVANCE

The likelihood that employees will apply what they learned to their work increases when training is relevant to the direct actions that workers need to perform in their everyday activities. Employee training strategies should not just be limited to the theoretical. When the link between training and task performance is crystal clear, it is easier for the employees to apply what they have just learned.

Here are three ways that help make training relevant:

1. Putting Emphasis on the "How"

Training how to complete tasks is the best way to help your employees find relevance and value in their training. Try to make the instructions very specific. Offer a more tangible way to train your employees by making use of practical examples, demonstrations, assessments, and test groups, rather than speeches and theoretical explanations.

2. Practice Makes Perfect

In order for us to learn new things, especially tasks that we have to repeat over and over again, the brain needs to make new neural pathways. The brain does this through practice. The more we do something, the more likely we are to remember how to do it in the future. The expression "practice makes perfect" derives from this concept.

So, provide opportunities for your employees to participate and practice specific tasks. This way, not only will they be more involved and alert throughout the training sessions, but also will be more likely to retain the information.

3. Set Standards and Expectations

Set end-goals for the training course. Your employees will be more motivated if they are given a set of clear and achievable standards and expectations that they need to meet. Having said that, assessments should be carried out in a constructive manner so that participants don't feel too much pressure.

HOW MOTIVATION PLAYS A KEY ROLE IN ACHIEVING PERFORMANCE PROFICIENCY

Training is a term that, depending on the individual, elicits different responses. For the employees, training is a signal of extensive, boring training sessions, while for the employer, it is a sign of development.

Understanding the role that motivation plays, and how to maximize it, is critical in rapidly advancing proficiency levels.

1. **Gamifying Learning**
   Games that have goals, rewards, and challenges are instantly stimulating to the player. Rewards and goals even become motivators themselves which, if implemented correctly, can incentivize employees to participate in, and even enjoy, training. Another motivational concern is morale. Employees who are confident and feel proud of accomplishing goals have greater motivation to continue. The modern workplace often sees employees as just another cog in the machine, but perhaps it is time for some of those formalities to die with the old century and make employees feel more valued and appreciated.

2. **Goals and Incentives**
   Motivation can also falter when employees feel lost, directionless

or develop a sense of futility. Clearly-defined and attainable goals that can achieve notable results will garner significant increases in motivation among employees, both in their work and in training. While these may solve issues of motivation, what can an employer do to be proactive in the training process? Employers can motivate employees with real incentives, both while working and in training. Motivate your employees to succeed in training by offering them raises, bonuses, or other perks that show them that they are appreciated by their management.

Managers should receive similar incentives and clearly-defined goals in order to motivate themselves to perform their duties well. Managers should also formulate and consistently update their motivation strategies to adapt to changing policies, strategies, and systems.

POST-TRAINING MUSTS – EVALUATION & IMMEDIATE APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

So the initial training sessions have ended and now you have arrived at the "gap" period, where the employee has acquired the critical work-related knowledge, yet is not fully ready to perform his/her tasks error-free, and without assistance from others.

In order to help the employee achieve full proficiency faster, it is imperative to follow a series of guidelines:

1. Evaluate Training Results

The first thing that executives should do after the initial training period is to evaluate the results. Look back at the original training objectives and see if the original goals were met. Look at what knowledge was successfully transferred and what knowledge was not. Then try to figure out why certain training elements were successful and others not. If the training session has been developed properly, then both of these objectives will be specific and measurable.

In addition, a relatively easy way in which employers can understand what needs to be done to improve training is to get employees' feedback. This can be done directly or on an individual basis, both

after the training has ended and at regular intervals.

You can personally ask or send out online surveys to your employees in order to learn how effective they believe the training session was and what difficulties, if any, remain.

2. Get Workers to Quickly Apply Knowledge

It is important that managers foster an environment in which their employees can easily apply the knowledge they learned. When they are able to do this, and thus see a direct connection between what they learned and their day-to-day activities, they are more likely to be willing to partake in future training sessions.

Finally, when employees begin applying the knowledge they learned in their day-to-day work, employers get a real understanding of the information learned throughout training.

3. Monitor Their Skills Closely

Aside from the initial training success assessment that you get from the employee feedback, it is very important to monitor your employees' skills closely after the training has been completed.

Results often fail to show up immediately, so it is better for employers to monitor their workers over a long period of time, while also taking care to bridge any gaps in their knowledge.

PERFORMANCE SUPPORT – LEARNING IN THE MOMENT OF NEED

[According to a McKinsey report](#), employees spend 1.8 hours every day—9.3 hours per week, on average—searching and gathering information. It is as if a company hires 5 employees, only to have 4 show up to work, while the 5th is off searching for answers and not contributing any value.

After the initial training period, how can you decrease the amount of time that your employees are spending searching for information?

1. Continuous Learning

Much has been written about continuous learning – looking at employee learning as a long-term process far beyond the initial training event - and its importance in strengthening employee performance. Jane Hart (industry analyst) wrote about [5 characteristics of contemporary knowledge workers](#), in which she stresses that workers learn best on-the-job when encountering a problem. This learn-as-you-go approach does not entirely eliminate the need for initial training. On the contrary, it allows the initial sessions to focus more on "big picture" issues, instead of focusing on small, technical details.

2. Blended Learning

It is most effective to combine initial learning and continuous learning. Blended learning is an effective technique where employers combine classroom time and online learning.

This online learning is a type of performance support that delivers information to the employee in the exact moment it is needed. If an employee forgets how to perform a particular task within some type of business software, he/she can get access to immediate, on-screen guidance without having to guess or ask for assistance.

No matter what software your employees are on, they can find an answer to a question without having to leave their desk or work area. This ability also brings about a sense of empowerment, since he/she now does not have to ask around and wait for assistance. This helps increase motivation levels and as a result, improves productivity.

3. Performance Support Technologies

There are several different types of performance support technologies available, and the role of a training manager is to find the best way to facilitate the use of learning materials at any time, accessible from anywhere, and on any device.

Mobile devices, primarily smartphones and tablet computers, have recently seen an increased role within performance support systems. As more companies adopt a BYOD (Bring Your Own consumer Device to work) policy, such devices allow employees to learn as they work, both at home, in the office, and on the move. Training managers must strategize on how to make

performance support software easily available and user-friendly.

[WalkMe](#), an online guidance and engagement technology, is able to provide employees a valuable performance aid that gives them simple, step-by-step instructions in the precise moment of uncertainty. WalkMe provides managers the opportunity to give their employees the tools to complete the most complex tasks. By using a series of interactive tip balloons overlaid on the software, employees see tasks broken down into short, step-by-step guided instructions. As a result, employees no longer need to focus on the technical aspects of operating the software and instead, on their main goals of using the software.

In the absence of such technology, learners struggle to figure out how to manage and operate the new software, whereas technology like this can guide them easily and quickly toward their final objective. WalkMe can also give you an accurate assessment of the progress of individual workers, as well as the progress of your work force as a whole by providing an analytics dashboards.

ABOUT WALKME

WalkMe provides a cloud-based platform for businesses to guide and engage employees through any online experience, accelerating time-to-competence, and helping employees successfully apply what they learn on any website or software.

As they work, employees receive immediate, onscreen step-by-step guidance in the moment of need, helping them successfully perform their most important tasks, no matter how complex. With WalkMe, employees no longer need to focus on the technical aspects of operating software, freeing them to be more productive and avoid mistakes. WalkMe improves training effectiveness and ensures a lasting impact on employee productivity, while reducing training costs.

WalkMe's Just-in-Time Contextual Guidance and Performance Support platform can simplify software and reduce training times and costs; accelerate adoption and increase user productivity; ensure proper usage and eliminate user confusion and errors by delivering knowledge at the moment of need; and streamline change management, helping your employees adapt to changes in their workflow or when migrating from other software.

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