

Three Signs Your Training Department is ID-Deficient

Have you ever worked on an eLearning program only to discover your hard work was in vain? The powers that be handed you content and told you to get to work. Being the proactive eLearning developer that you are, you dove into the deep end with the blood thirsty sharks, head first. You immediately started developing an eLearning course – writing storyboards, creating graphics, testing navigation, programming buttons, configuring quizzes – the whole nine yards. After you submitted the course for review, however, the client decided the content was no longer relevant. You scrapped the course and pondered over the precious development hours you'd never get back. Naturally you were upset and after a silent soliloquy of swearwords you remembered you had bills to pay. Well, what happened? I'll tell you what happened: your training department was ID-deficient or instructional design-deficient. Guess what? I've seen this malady a few times in my day. Initially, you don't recognize the symptoms, but eventually you begin to notice signs here and there. Here are three signs your training department lacks an instructional design foundation:

1. **Objectives Omission Syndrome (OOS).** This syndrome occurs when a client decides to omit course objectives from the training program. For instance, on a past project, a client told me to forego the course objectives. I was baffled and confused. How could we assess the effectiveness of the course without objectives? Instructional designers and eLearning developers know the importance of learning objectives. Well-written objectives are the foundation of any training program. I doubt architects build hotels or stadiums without blueprints. As any credible learning architect knows, training objectives are crucial.
2. **Buzzword Driven Complex (BDC).** BDC comes about when someone hears or sees a training buzzword such as “interactive” or “engaging.” People regurgitate the hackneyed terms in emails, meetings, and watercooler conversations, but no one really knows how to integrate them into training projects. I used to work on a team, for example, that thought making programs “interactive” meant adding audio and/or video. Adding audio or video for the sake of adding them didn't make the program more interactive – it simply made the course audibly and visually annoying.
3. **Quantity Conundrum Simplex (QCS).** Does your department develop courses to achieve some arbitrary numerical goal? For example, during planning, your team decides to create 33 eLearning programs the following year. I've worked under these conditions and know for a fact that it generates nothing but Bona Fide, Grade A, garbage. We simply developed programs to reach a goal. We didn't complete a front-end analysis or conduct Level 1 evaluations; we just created programs on a whim. Oftentimes, this approach led to several unused and useless programs.

Do you recognize any of the above symptoms in your department? How do you plan to cure your department's ID-deficiency? There's no panacea, so what can you do? Well, that's the trick! If you're a magician or illusionist – as they're referred to these days – abracadabra may work for you. However, for the rest of us, it depends on the receptiveness of our teams to new ideas. Are your teammates willing to try something new? If so, here are a few recommendations to help you cultivate a healthy, ID-driven department:

1. Set up monthly meetings to discuss instructional design topics and training trends. If you're a member of a professional training organization (such as ATD or the eLearning Guild) use available resources to decide meeting topics. If you attend training webinars or conferences, share what you

learned during your monthly team meetings. You can also encourage your teammates to submit meeting topics.

2. Share training articles with your department. If you subscribe to training newsletters, share relevant articles with your team or summarize key points in a brief email (use examples to show your teammates how to apply recommended practices to their daily training development activities).
3. Set up an internal blog/wiki page and have your teammates subscribe to it. You can write your own articles describing your best practices, tips, and tricks. Your blog posts may enlighten and inspire your teammates. Encourage your teammates to submit blog topics or to write articles for your blog.

If your department is receptive, they're well on their way to becoming an ID-healthy organization. Your training materials will improve and your learners will get more out of your training programs. Remember, your goal is to use instructional design principles to revolutionize your learners' training experiences and you can't do that if your department is ID-deficient.

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