

Newsletter Article Submission for Career Development Professional Associations:
Written by NCDA and CCDA Member, Alice Rush, M.A., MCDP

What is our bottom-line value as Career Counselors? For over ten years, our profession has been asking questions about ROI (return-on-investment) for corporate career centers, counseling and training services. As Robin Hammond wrote about in the CCDA newsletter last year, it seems the only research data available is anecdotal or in client testimonial form. This deficiency of research data relating to how corporate career development impacts the 'bottom-line' in business seriously affects continued employee funding for our profession.

I've worked in several corporate career centers for the past ten years, where some centers have continued to be funded-and others have not. Therefore, I have felt it was (and is) my personal mission to research how corporate career development programs can benefit an organization's prosperity. An effective salesperson always asks, "What's in it for my client? What are the benefits they will receive from my service?" Corporate Career Development professionals and counselors have been asking these same questions, yet their answers may or may not be convincing corporate executives. Until now.

Holly Burkett, M.A., Evaluation Works Expert, is a certified ROI professional and an elected board member of the ROI Network. Her 15 years experience evaluating diverse cross-cultural performance improvement initiatives in such areas as career development, succession planning, among others, I believe will contribute greatly to our profession. Below is a recent interview I conducted with Holly in hopes of contributing to more continued research in our profession.

"Holly, What is your methodology and how do you approach your projects?"

Traditionally, evaluation processes tend to be reactive and after-the-fact. In making the transition from a reactive approach to a more proactive, systemic, and results-based effort, it's important to dispel the myth that evaluation is an "add-on" process occurring at the end of a program. Integrating evaluation into the framework of a training or Career Development Program means weaving evaluation strategies through-out the assessment, design, and delivery stages.

Donald Kirkpatrick developed a Four-level model of categorizing evaluation data that has been used as a common frame of reference for several decades. Jack Phillips (1997) expanded upon this framework to incorporate a fifth level of evaluation for capturing the financial impact, or ROI (Return on Investment), of performance improvement programs. Briefly, Phillip's Five Level Framework for Evaluation includes the following:

1. Reaction and Planned Action: Measures participant's reaction to the program and outlines specific plans for implementation.
2. Learning: Measures the extent to which participants learned skills, knowledge, or attitudes.
3. Application: Measures the extent to which participants applied learned skills or knowledge back on the job.
4. Business impact: Measures the extent to which participants' applied skills or knowledge made a difference to business results.
5. ROI: Measures the monetary value of the results in relation to the costs for the program, usually expressed as a percentage. The framework serves as a roadmap for conducting evaluation and emphasizes beginning with "the end in mind", as Stephen Covey says. Specifically, it applies a proven, step-by-step process for: collecting data across all five levels;

isolating the effects of a training and development program; converting data to monetary value; and identifying the intangible benefits of a program.

What have been your results so far working with your clients?

I've had the good fortune of being able to apply Phillip's evaluation model to a variety of programs in a range of business environments. For instance, as a senior consultant with Apple Computer's manufacturing operation, I worked with production client groups to measure the impact of a structured OJT program upon key business measures. Through systematic Pre and Post assessments, a control group arrangement, targeted action planning, Management Briefings, and scheduled follow-up sessions, we were able to demonstrate the link between improved efficiency measures like downtime and process errors and the training initiative. Again, with Phillip's approach, we isolated the effects of other variables that influenced improvement and still showed a tangible, compelling ROI with the program.

I've also worked with management groups to demonstrate the link between applied career development practices and such improved business measures as job satisfaction, productivity, training time, and labor efficiency. There are many exciting stories and case studies about the success of this model in other organizations -- more than 700 individuals are certified in Phillip's ROI methodology and its been utilized by hundreds of organizations -- companies like Allstate, Amazon, Nextel, Federal Express, the US Department of Defense, among others -- in over 32 countries.

What do you hope to accomplish in your evaluation profession/ business?

I want to assist clients in quantifying the bottom line value of their investment. I want to assist in dispelling myths about evaluation, particularly w/respect to soft skills training. Everybody wants to make a difference; my goal is to be a catalyst for practitioners and clients to be able to show just how they made that difference. How do you wish prospective clients or professionals wanting additional information to contact you?

Holly Burkett, M.A., SPHR, Principal, Evaluation Works
Phone and Fax (530) 756-1906
Email: burketth@earthlink.net

I hope this article and interview data with Holly encourages many of you to expand your empirical career development research efforts. Holly is currently working with me (and respected associates) on several projects. Watch for our upcoming article on "Specific Evaluation Case Studies in Career Development."

Alice Rush, MA, RPC, MCC, *CareerU*[®] (Counselor/Owner)
www.careeru.com, (916) 349-7855.