



“The first step on the road to high performance begins with a choice.”

The AURA of Effective Training

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The AURA of Effective Training

Do you want to maximize the amount of course content students are aware of, understand, retain, and apply? If so, consider the AURA of an effective training system. My experiences as a trainer have taken many forms over the years, but the AURA always applies.

For the past twenty years, I have been solely doing classroom style training. You know, the kind where a presenter shares their data viz and talks. Of course, we must realize that if we drone on, we saddle our students with the low probability of actual skill retention.

Prior to that time, I hardly did any classroom style training at all. Paradoxically, even though I was plant manager in a rapidly growing company, I had a significant need to teach people on an almost daily basis. Which experience represents more effective training?

Since March 2020, most of my training has been of the virtual nature. After hundreds of classroom days as a virtual facilitator, I have learned a lot and improved my courses. You can read about [my virtual training experience thoughts in my post](#) on that topic.

If you would like to explore how I teach a virtual course that is 35% lecture and 65% exercise-based, check out my post on [my experiences teaching the 3-day virtual TapRoot® root cause analysis course](#).

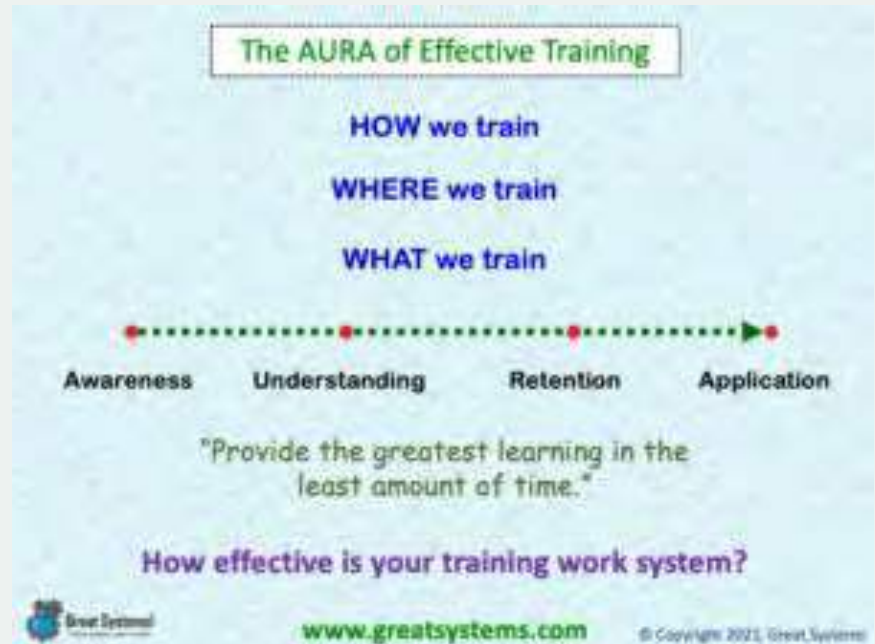
How Effective is Your Training Work System?

In all three cases, I spend a lot of time with a lot of students. In each case, I think they learn something. As I compare how each format uses training time from a training effectiveness perspective, I continue to ask. To what degree do I truly deliver classroom, virtual, and on-the-job training that is value added?

If you have read my content before, you may know my opinions about classroom training. In short, I think most lecture-based training is a waste of time.

The statistics show that people retain, let alone apply, very little of what they hear in a lecture over the weeks that follow course completion.

Previously, classroom training was the dominant training delivery method. Computer-based training (CBT) is now in the lead.



I am a cost-conscious industrial engineer at heart, and I know that organizations collectively invest millions of dollars in training each day.

This really bothers me. I could easily go off on a rant about this, but I already used post space to do so in the past on this topic.

Instead, we would be better off to talk about what we might want to try to do to improve the situation. I really doubt that the number of hours we spend on training each year will decline in future years.

The Need for Training Work System Improvement

Training design and delivery is a process that cries out for improvement. Also, there is an urgent need for this improvement to occur.

Our workforce continues to age and retire. Ideally, we capture and transfer all of that experiential knowledge our older employees possess to our younger folks. Our seniors typically leave before we can video those key repair tricks that keep things in operation.

Business and education groups continue to debate about, and struggle to find, a way to better prepare graduates for the workplace. This was a problem twenty years ago. I don't think we have made that much progress, but I do know that the workplace has sure changed a lot.

The bottom line is simple. We spend a lot of money on training. Plus, we don't have very good metrics to gauge the effectiveness of this investment.

If my suspicions are correct, we waste a lot of money each day. In a lot of cases, we don't seem to worry about this waste that much. Fortunately, the solution is also simple IF we can alter our mental models as to what really constitutes effective training.

At the start of this post, I stated that I did not do much classroom training as a plant manager. However, I did not state that we did not train our people. We did a lot of training, but not in the traditional lecture-based way.

Provide 'Just in Time' Training Where the Work is Done

In essence, we trained on the job as the need arose. When I say 'we', I mean each of the leaders on our plant floor and in our support groups. The phrase 'on the job' means out on the floor where the work is done instead of in a classroom.

When I say 'as the need arose', I mean we look for learning moments as each day unfolds. We can use these moments to help meet the training needs we know exist from our performance trends and customer requirements.

This approach worked. However, as plant leaders, we had to perform our jobs as managers, supervisors, and support people in a manner that was quite different than the norm.

We didn't spend a lot of time in our offices or in meeting rooms. A lot of time was spent watching people work. We would ask people questions and review performance trends to help us be in a better position to consistently meet the needs of our customers.

This training tactic worked much better than bringing people into a classroom to cover job performance 'how tos'. We were able to provide immediate, and usually positive, performance feedback as our students 'practiced.'

Plus, we could help them better retain and apply the skills we need them to use in the future. How do you measure and improve 'on the job' training effectiveness?

What is the AURA 'of Effective Training'?

That's what the AURA of effective training is all about. AURA is an acronym for Awareness-Understanding-Retention-Application.

“The first step on the road to high performance begins with a choice.”

In my previous life as a Training Manager, I began to use this four-word chain to help me develop more effective training. At that time, I called it the learning continuum. However, this all changed one day in class.

In the class, I was talking about the need to improve our training approaches. Our goal was to better bridge the gap between awareness creation and skill application.

One of my students pointed out that the four letters of this chain spelled out the word AURA. I was delighted with this observation. It sure made me glad that I try to let my students talk a little bit when I teach in a classroom setting.

Training Practice Fields Help Maximize Skill Retention

Do you want to improve your training process? If so, you must help your students retain and apply the skills you share with them in class. The easiest way to do this is to make our courses more practice focused when we must present them in a classroom setting.

More importantly, we must find ways to spend a greater portion of our training time out on the practice field itself. It is tough to learn a lot in the locker room.

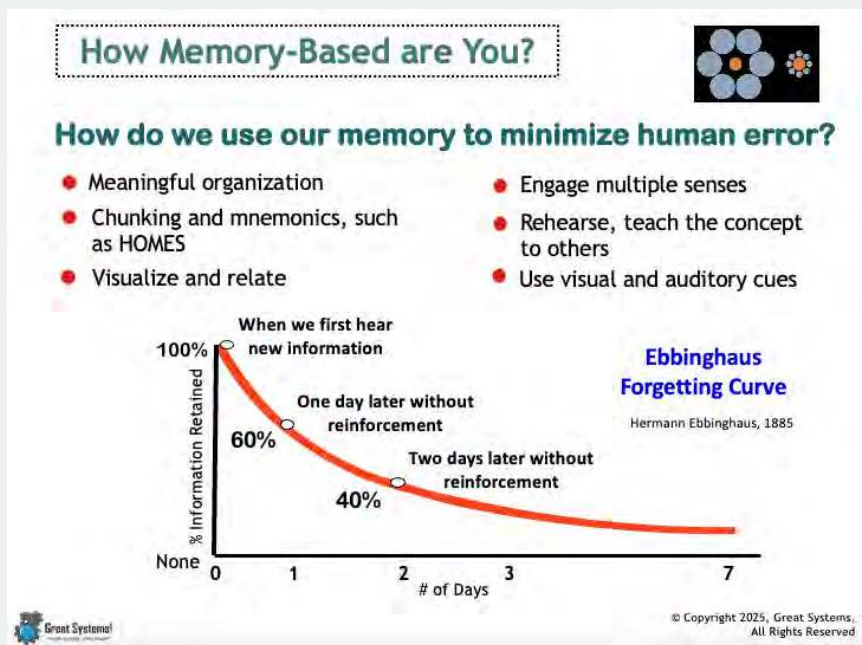
Our people cannot effectively retain and apply most of the skills we need without repetition and practice. We can't ensure our work teams retain and apply the right skills correctly unless we as leaders provide performance feedback on a regular basis.

To significantly decrease the amount of waste that occurs in the training world, we must find ways to get out of our offices and meeting rooms.

Today's leaders must spend time to help people learn, instead of listening to themselves talk. How do you teach people to lift safely?

Do you have them demonstrate safe lifts over and over or do you merely show and tell them how to lift correctly? How often do you simply show them a film or CBT PowerPoint on the topic? What degree of skill transfer truly occurs?

[CHECK OUT my 'How to Measure and Improve Training Effectiveness' web page](#)





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How Do You Learn to Remember?

If you doubt me, think about the last course you attended. How much of what you heard do you still remember?

Of those things you remember, how much do you use? For example, did you attend several days of statistics-laden six sigma training?

How much of this training do you remember and use? Do you feel competent to lead and facilitate a team after only two days of lecture on those topics? Would you like to practice those skills for a while before you begin to use them?

Don't you think we need to improve our training processes a little bit here? Is there an aura of effectiveness that emanates from the training you participate in and provide?

I know that I continue to look for ways to practice more in my classrooms so my training is more effective. I hope you will as well.

DOWNLOAD my [Corrective Action Tactics and Mistake Proofing Workshop Overview](#)

About the author

As Chief Excellence Officer of Great Systems LLC, Kevin McManus provides virtual coaching and content to help people use proven best practices to enhance and optimize their daily work systems.

Over forty years of work experience in roles such as Industrial Engineer, Training Manager, Production Manager, Plant Manager, and Director of Quality give Kevin a 'real life work' perspective relative to daily work process optimization, work team engagement and empowerment, and sustainable operational excellence.



As a contract trainer for the TapRoot® root cause analysis process, Kevin has taught over 450 courses and further enhanced his ability to help leaders proactively minimize risk, reduce errors, and improve reliability. Kevin holds an undergraduate degree in Industrial Engineering and an MBA. He served as a national Malcolm Baldrige Performance Excellence Award Examiner for twenty years, including a three-year term on the national Judge's Panel.

Kevin has authored the monthly performance improvement column for Industrial and Systems Engineer magazine for over 20 years, is an Institute of Industrial and Systems Engineering Fellow and has been a member of IISE for over forty years. His newest book, "Different Company – How the Best Build Great Organizations", will be published in late 2025.

If you would like more information about the improvement tools and systems I have to offer, please send me an e-mail at kevin@greatsystems.com.

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- Two assessments to help you gauge the degree of support your lean efforts require and how much progress you make

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