Level One Evaluation: Reaction

In order to have a good discussion about Kirkpatrick's Level One Evaluation it is helpful to see Kirkpatrick's complete model of evaluation. Below is a diagram of Kirkpatrick's Four Levels of Evaluation Model (1994) of reaction, learning, performance, and impact.

The Kirkpatrick's Four Levels of Training Evaluation

Level One:

This is the first step of Kirkpatrick's evaluation process where students are asked to evaluate the training they attended after completing the program. These are sometimes called smile sheets or happy sheets because in their simplest form they measure how well students liked the training. Don't be fooled by the adjectives though, this type of evaluation can reveal useful data if the right questions asked are:

- The relevance of the objectives.
- The ability of the course to maintain interest.
- The amount and appropriateness of interactive exercises.
- The perceived value and transferability to the workplace.
There are those who dislike the Level One Evaluation and scoff at its results being scientific and controlled. Some suggest that just one question need be answered: "Would you recommend this course to a friend or colleague? Why or why not?"

Every training intervention needs some kind of feedback loop, to make sure that within the context of the learning objectives it is relevant, appropriately designed, and competently executed.
At Level I the intention is not to measure if, or to what extent, learning took place (that's Level 2); nor is it intended to examine the learner's ability to transfer the skills or knowledge from the classroom to the workplace (Level 3); nor does it attempt to judge the ultimate impact of the learning on the business (Level 4). Level I of Kirkpatrick's model is intended simply to gauge learner satisfaction.

The concern or disdain of the Level One Evaluation in many cases comes from poorly designed evaluations that may "steer" respondents. Too many close ended questions without room for comment limit attendee's comments. The type of questions asked can limit the areas the student is "allowed" to evaluate. Open ended questions while tedious may provide fuller feedback.

Trainers also need to understand that sound analytical evaluations often require multistage studies. Your end-of-course feedback may indicate a problem area, but will not tell you specifically what the problem is. A follow-up survey, by questionnaire, by informal conversation, or by holding a brief focus group, will tell you a great deal more than you could possibly find out under end-of-course conditions.

The level one evaluation none-the-less is an important first step. We need to remember the word level one does indeed imply there are more levels of evaluation. These successive evaluations will help dig deeper into the training experience and assist with identifying that your training programs helped move the organization toward realizing business outcomes. Understanding the objectives/outcomes of any training goal prior to class design will always be the key measure of a successful training program. Without precise and clear objectives the ultimate success of a training program cannot be measured.

The good news about the level one evaluation is that learners are keenly aware of what they need to know to accomplish a task. If the training program fails to satisfy their needs, a thoughtful evaluation will allow the opportunity to determine whether it's the fault of the program design or delivery.

References:
