More Praise for
The Six Disciplines of Breakthrough Learning

"Six Disciplines is a timely book written by experienced authors to help learning and development professionals deliver results. With proven methods, presented in a logical style, this book is a must-read for anyone interested in improving the impact of training and development."

—Jack J. Phillips, chairman, ROI Institute

"Nothing matters without results. Six Disciplines offers a straightforward but profound methodology for achieving extraordinary results, time after time."

—Leo Burke, associate dean and director of executive education, Mendoza College of Business, University of Notre Dame

"The pundits all talk about breakthrough learning, but until now, no one has provided clear, concise coaching about how to attain it. This vital and must-read book should affect the way every thinking person looks at learning."

—Richard J. Leider, founder, The Inventure Group, and author, The Power of Purpose and Claiming Your Place at the Fire

"Finally, a book that effectively links training and development to business results and shows us how to make strategy happen. A classic in the making."

—Al Vicere, executive education professor of strategic leadership, Smeal College of Business, Penn State University, and president, Vicere Associates, Inc.

"The Six Disciplines of Breakthrough Learning is imperative for executives competing in today’s fast moving knowledge economy which makes learning and adjustment so crucial. I’m eagerly applying their extraordinary insights regarding turning costs into investments and new knowledge into improved results."

—Mickey Connolly, CEO, Conversant Solutions, and coauthor, The Communications Catalyst
“Integrating work and development is critical in today’s competitive environment. This book is a breakthrough by pathfinders in ensuring application and results from any learning experience.”

—Teresa Roche, vice president, global learning and leadership development, Agilent Technologies

“The Six Disciplines of Breakthrough Learning shows the complete process needed to achieve the Holy Grail of business education: documentable results. You will learn why excellent education is not enough; in fact, you will fail to produce the results you need unless you address the critical steps both before and after the ‘education’ itself.”

—Gifford Pinchot, III, president, Bainbridge Graduate Institute and author, Intrapreneuring

“The Six Disciplines of Breakthrough Learning describes how to embrace and reap full benefit from training and development and gain C-level respect. Too often training and development professionals focus on the learning event, rather than on outcomes and business results. Training and development needs to walk the talk of business. By following the Six Disciplines, readers will maximize return on investments through partnering with management.”

—Darlene Van Tiem, associate professor, performance improvement and instructional design, University of Michigan, Dearborn

“All the training in the world does not mean a thing unless there is true transfer! Six Disciplines is a jewel, loaded with practical perspectives on creating true ROI from learning investments.”

—Elliott Masie, CEO, The MASIE Center’s Learning CONSORTIUM
About This Book

This book is for everyone who is a provider, purchaser, or consumer of corporate training and development. It describes a proven set of disciplines and tools to achieve a breakthrough in corporate education and thus significantly improve the return on the investment that companies make in learning and development.

Why is this topic important?

Competitiveness increasingly depends on know-how, human capital, and the ability to learn quickly at both the individual and organizational levels. Companies invest heavily in training and development—more than $50 billion annually in the United States alone—in an effort to improve the quality of their leadership, product development, quality, customer service, and so forth (Dolezalek, 2004). There is compelling evidence that these investments can and do pay dividends.

There is equally compelling evidence, however, that the business impact of learning and development can be much greater than most organizations currently achieve. Substantial value is being left on the table in the form of “learning scrap”—training and development that is never transferred to the work of the organization in a way that produces results.

What can you achieve with this book?

This book describes and illustrates six disciplines that together represent a breakthrough in training and development: (1) define outcomes in business terms, (2) design the complete experience, (3) deliver for results, (4) drive follow-through, (5) deploy active support, and (6) document results. By practicing these six disciplines, readers will be able to design, deliver, and document learning and development programs that produce greater business impact and higher returns on investment.

How is the book organized?

In the first chapter we provide a brief overview of the six disciplines. We then dedicate a full chapter to each discipline, exploring it in depth and providing recommendations and tools to maximize its contribution. Insights from exceptional business and learning leaders, as well as case studies, are used to illustrate key concepts. At the end of each chapter, we provide action items for both general managers and learning leaders, because maximizing return on investment from learning and development requires a true partnership between line management and learning leaders.
About Pfeiffer

Pfeiffer serves the professional development and hands-on resource needs of training and human resource practitioners and gives them products to do their jobs better. We deliver proven ideas and solutions from experts in HR development and HR management, and we offer effective and customizable tools to improve workplace performance. From novice to seasoned professional, Pfeiffer is the source you can trust to make yourself and your organization more successful.

**Essential Knowledge**  
Pfeiffer produces insightful, practical, and comprehensive materials on topics that matter the most to training and HR professionals. Our Essential Knowledge resources translate the expertise of seasoned professionals into practical, how-to guidance on critical workplace issues and problems. These resources are supported by case studies, worksheets, and job aids and are frequently supplemented with CD-ROMs, websites, and other means of making the content easier to read, understand, and use.

**Essential Tools**  
Pfeiffer’s Essential Tools resources save time and expense by offering proven, ready-to-use materials—including exercises, activities, games, instruments, and assessments—for use during a training or team-learning event. These resources are frequently offered in looseleaf or CD-ROM format to facilitate copying and customization of the material.

Pfeiffer also recognizes the remarkable power of new technologies in expanding the reach and effectiveness of training. While e-hype has often created whizbang solutions in search of a problem, we are dedicated to bringing convenience and enhancements to proven training solutions. All our e-tools comply with rigorous functionality standards. The most appropriate technology wrapped around essential content yields the perfect solution for today’s on-the-go trainers and human resource professionals.

*Essential resources for training and HR professionals*
THE SIX DISCIPLINES OF BREAKTHROUGH LEARNING
THE SIX DISCIPLINES OF BREAKTHROUGH LEARNING

How to Turn Training and Development Into Business Results


foreword by
Kevin D. Wilde

afterword by
Marshall Goldsmith

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To our clients, for allowing us to work with them in their pursuit of excellence; to our employees, for making it happen; and to our families, for encouraging us to pursue our dreams.
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Good books are hard to put down. This is a great book you will want to put down.

When I first read *The Six Disciplines of Breakthrough Learning*, I found myself stopping repeatedly and putting it down so I could take notes on ideas I wanted to apply to my own work or an insight in the book that really hit me.

The first time I put the book down came after reading a compelling example. The first discipline, “Define Outcomes in Business Terms,” seems simple enough. The example was about a new management development program. A talented and hard-working training team designed an air-tight course: activities planned to the minute, world-class external faculty and cutting-edge simulations . . . all grounded in specific learning objectives. But the team fell short by failing to first clearly identify how the company would benefit from having leaders attend the program. I’ve been there—so caught up in crafting the excellence of the learning event that we failed to ground everything in the real business case. When that happens, the results leave you heartbroken, far short of the learning breakthrough you intended.

The second time I put the book down was when it challenged me to reconsider what I thought was none of my business. The second discipline, “Design the Complete Experience,” stresses the necessity for training and development professionals to start owning the whole process of learning—before, during, and after a development offering. This notion goes far beyond traditional pre-work to areas such as setting expectations upfront for application and learner accountability and actively employing the participant’s manager in the process. After reflecting on the case examples and tools provided, I realized that actively and skillfully managing the “before” and “after” really are my core responsibilities.

The last time I put the book down, the whole picture became clear. When I finished the book, I realized that achieving the true potential of development happens with the consistent application of all six disciplines. Work any one area and you’ll see improvement. Work all six areas consistently and you can achieve breakthrough learning.
The Six Disciplines of Breakthrough Learning integrates the latest thinking in the field of development from a number of diverse perspectives and fills in the gaps with original material and insight. All in all, this book will move you to action, and I am convinced it will move the learning and development field ahead.

Kevin D. Wilde
Vice President Chief Learning Officer
General Mills, Inc.
Execution is not just tactics; it is a discipline and a system.
—Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan

We have been part of corporate education programs that were truly transformational, that helped propel their companies to a higher level of performance and delivered results of significant value. We became interested in what differentiated programs that delivered breakthrough results from those that did not. We discovered that there is no one “magic bullet.” Rather, breakthrough programs are the result of a disciplined and systematic approach to learning and development, executed with passion and excellence. Over the past six years, we have distilled the practices that characterize breakthrough learning and development initiatives into six disciplines (Figure I.1).

Figure I.1. The Six Disciplines That Turn Learning into Business Results.

1. Define Business Outcomes
2. Design Complete Experience
3. Deliver for Application
4. Drive Follow-through
5. Deploy Active Support
6. Document Results
We began to teach and use these disciplines to help companies improve the outcomes of their learning and development initiatives. Although most of our work has been with classroom-based programs, the principles also apply to e-learning, action learning, and blended approaches. We discovered that starting each of the six disciplines with a D served as a valuable mnemonic for thinking about program design, execution, and evaluation. More important, we were able to show a connection between how well each discipline was practiced and the overall effectiveness of the learning intervention.

Here we provide a brief introduction to each of the six disciplines. In the remainder of the book, we dedicate a full chapter to each, exploring it in depth and providing examples and tools to maximize its contribution.

**DI: DEFINE OUTCOMES IN BUSINESS TERMS**

A central theme of our work is that learning and development programs are critical investments that companies make in their human capital for which they expect a return in terms of greater effectiveness, improved productivity, enhanced customer satisfaction, and so forth.

A reality of corporate life is that there are always more good ideas for investments—in research, training, marketing, sales, or manufacturing—than even the most affluent company can afford. Hence, one of management’s most important tasks is to decide where to invest the company’s human and financial assets in order to generate the greatest return for shareholders. To earn a share of the annual investment pool in this era of increased competition and pressure for economic performance, corporate learning and development must be able to show how its efforts contribute to better business results.

Therefore, the first, and most critical, discipline in developing a breakthrough program is to define its objectives in business terms. The phrase “in business terms” is key. Every program has learning objectives in educational terms, which might include, for example, “appreciate and accept their managerial role,” “define the coaching process,” or “describe the four developmental levels.” From a line manager’s perspective, however, it is not clear how achieving objectives stated in this way contributes to the way in which the company creates value. Business leaders want to know

- What benefit will this program return to the business?
- How will it translate into improved performance for the participants and for the organization as a whole?
• How will the change be measured?
• What will it be worth?

The program participants’ ability to understand, describe, list, or appreciate may be important prerequisites to business application, but if they are all that the program achieves, then it will fall short of business leaders’ expectations.

Learning needs to be an integral part of the business strategy. In Chapter D1 we underscore the importance of making sure that there is open, transparent, and readily apparent alignment between the goals of learning programs and the needs of the business. We share suggestions and case studies on how learning and line leaders can work together to achieve this vital articulation. We examine the real-life roadblocks to this endeavor and ways to overcome them. Finally, we underscore the benefits of understanding the value chain of learning, mapping the intended impact, picking the right problems to address, and managing management’s expectations.

“[T]he good learning strategy seeks out the most important points of failure in an organization; it then replaces risk with competence and support so that people on those points find ways to succeed where they might otherwise fail” (Bordonaro, 2005, p. 142).

D2: DESIGN THE COMPLETE EXPERIENCE

A second theme throughout this book is that in business, learning creates value only when it is transferred to the participant’s work and applied to good effect. Factors that influence the transfer of learning, therefore, influence the impact achieved, the return on investment, and whether or not the program is considered a success from the business’s perspective.

Historically, corporate educational units have focused on instruction; little or no attention was paid to what happened after the instruction was completed. The second discipline—design the complete experience—recognizes that learning and development is now being judged by the business results it generates; therefore, learning initiatives should incorporate all the factors that help maximize results, including some outside the traditional scope of training and development.

Achieving a breakthrough requires treating learning as an ongoing process, rather than an isolated event. The second discipline of breakthrough learning demands a new paradigm: that program design must encompass the participant’s complete experience—not just what happens in the classroom (or its virtual equivalent). High-impact programs appreciate that learning begins before, and continues after, the course itself.
They approach learning holistically and systemically, paying special attention to the impact of the participant’s manager and work environment on learning transfer and application.

In Chapter D2, we examine the elements that constitute the “complete experience” and that support or impede learning transfer. We suggest methods and tools to optimize results, many of which are outside the traditional purview of the training organization, and which, we hope, challenge conventional thinking. Our goal is to change the paradigm about learning and development by redefining the finish line from the last day of instruction to documented delivery of business results. We show that Phase III of learning—the postinstructional transfer and application period—is a particularly rich opportunity for a breakthrough.

Figure I.2. Training and Development Needs to Design the Complete Experience, Not Just Hope for a Miracle to Transform Learning into Results.

"I think you should be more explicit here in step two."

Source: Copyright © 2005 Sidney Harris from cartoonbank.com.
Designing for the complete experience—especially the way in which the work environment influences learning transfer—allows corporate education to realize its full promise of delivering value to the organization. Since future programs will be funded (or not funded) according to the results they deliver, we believe that it is in everyone’s best interest to actively plan, support, and manage the learning transfer and application process—not leave it to chance.

**D3: DELIVER FOR APPLICATION**

The third discipline that characterizes breakthrough training programs is that they deliver for application. That is, irrespective of the specific delivery vehicle, they ensure that information, concepts, and skills are introduced in ways that facilitate their transfer and application on the job. Delivering for application helps participants bridge the learning-doing gap between the learning environment and their day-to-day work.

In Chapter D3, we look at innovative ways that progressive companies are narrowing the learning-doing gap by making the relevance of the material clear, showing how each element is connected to real business issues, illustrating how the material can be *applied* to business needs, motivating application by answering the “what’s in it for me?” question, and helping participants actively plan for transfer and application.

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*Figure I.3. There Is Always a Gap Between Learning in the Program and Doing the Work, Which Must Be Traversed to Achieve Improved Results.*
Delivering for application in a program that has clearly defined business outcomes, active support for transfer, and a system of follow-through hastens the learner’s journey from current to improved performance.

**D4: DRIVE FOLLOW-THROUGH**

The objectives that people set to follow through on learning and development experiences are important *business* objectives. They should be treated as such. The fourth discipline of breakthrough learning is to drive follow-through—to actively manage the transfer and application process for optimum results.

Companies that derive the greatest payback from their educational investments are those that put in place mechanisms to ensure that participants set the right objectives, that they follow through on their commitments, and that their managers hold them accountable for doing so. Unfortunately, putting these mechanisms in place has proven difficult. “Talk to any group of layman or professionals about what’s broken in the current learning and development process, and most will tell you it’s the lack of serious post-training follow-through” (Zenger, Folkman, & Sherwin, 2005, p. 30).

In Chapter D4 we discuss the breakthrough in follow-through management made possible by recent developments in technology. We set
out the requirements for effectively practicing the discipline of driving follow-through, address the current impediments to learning transfer and how to overcome them, point out the high cost of doing nothing, and provide case examples of how follow-through management enhances the value of already effective programs.

**D5: DEPLOY ACTIVE SUPPORT**

Companies that are serious about maximizing the return on their investment in learning and development recognize that the program isn’t over until the learning is successfully applied and new skills mastered. To ensure that this occurs, they practice the fifth discipline: they provide various forms of ongoing support after the participant returns to his or her job. Learning and line leaders work together to develop a culture that recognizes that support for learning transfer is everyone’s responsibility. They “put their money where their mouth is” by reallocating some of their resources from pure instruction to providing support for transfer and application.

In Chapter D5, we review the profound influence that the work environment—particularly the participant’s manager—has on whether learning is applied or scrapped. We discuss the need to balance accountability and support and the new demands this places on the learning organization and line management and we present innovative methods and technologies to ensure that the environment is conducive to optimizing results.

**D6: DOCUMENT RESULTS**

The sixth discipline of breakthrough learning and development is to document results to justify continued investment and support continuous improvement. Requiring proof of results to justify continued investment in learning is no different from what is expected of other departments.

If marketers want money to redesign packaging because they believe it will improve sales, they have to present their rationale—the chain of evidence and assumptions—that supports their proposal. And if the package redesign is approved, they know that they will be called on the carpet at some future date to provide evidence that they achieved the promised results. Departments and leaders who consistently deliver on their objectives gain resources and influence; those who fail to deliver, or who are unable to offer evidence one way or the other, lose. In other words, it is much more difficult to cut the budget of a learning and development organization that has credible, documented evidence of business impact than one that has only measures of training activity.
The sixth discipline of documenting results is essential to supporting a cycle of continuous learning, adaptation, and improvement. The results documented in D6 become the raw material for the next cycle of defining outcomes, designing experiences, delivering, driving, deploying, and documenting. A never-ending cycle of reinvention and renewal ensures that corporate education keeps pace with the changing competitive environment, workforce, and business needs.

In Chapter D6, we discuss why learning and development must document results. We provide guidance on what to measure (what really matters to the sponsors), how to collect and analyze the information, and, especially important, how to market the results internally.

**SUMMARY**

Learning and development programs are investments by a company in its workforce. Management has a fiduciary and ethical responsibility