

The Four Levels Are Still Relevant

By Donald Kirkpatrick

Can you believe that my four articles on reaction, learning, behavior, and results were printed in *T+D* more than 50 years ago?

Immediately, they began to get the attention of workplace trainers. Some called them the “four levels” while others named them the “Kirkpatrick Model” for evaluating training programs.

They were based on my 1954 PhD dissertation at the University of Wisconsin—research I had done between 1954 and 1959. In 1959, Bob Craig, then editor of *T+D*, asked if I would write an article on evaluation. I told him I could write a series of four articles. He hesitated, because no series had ever appeared in the publication, but he finally agreed.

As I think back on Craig’s decision to run the series, I wonder if they would ever have been published for the world to see had he chosen not to. I had no thoughts then of writing an article or series of articles, but soon after the articles were published, trainers began to write articles on each of the levels.

I recently asked LinkedIn participants whether the four levels are out of date. I received more than 40 responses from people strongly stating, “no.”

The problem, the majority of them commented, is that most workplace training professionals are effective in evaluating Level 1, reaction, and Level 2, learning, but not Level 3, behavior or Level 4, results. This is because they don’t think it is necessary or don’t know how to do it.

It is necessary. In today’s tough business climate, it is imperative that learning professionals link learning initiatives to business goals and prove their value in this new workplace.



As I think back on Craig’s decision to publish the series, I wonder if they would ever have been published for the world to see. I had no thoughts then of writing an article or series of articles, but soon after the articles were published, trainers began to write articles on each of the levels. I recently asked LinkedIn participants whether the four levels are out of date. I received more than 40 responses from people strongly stating, “No.”

Don Kirkpatrick

I continue to be invited to ASTD chapters and national conferences to present courses on the four levels. At the 2010 ASTD International Conference & Exposition in Chicago, I presented two sessions on the four levels, which were well attended. I guess that proves that the four levels are alive and well.

Donald Kirkpatrick is professor emeritus at the University of Wisconsin and honorary chairman of Kirkpatrick Partners; dleekirk1@aol.com.

IN MEMORIAM Vince Miller



Vincent A. Miller (Vince), 1974 volunteer president of ASTD’s Board of Directors, passed away on Tuesday, July 27, 2010. He lived with his daughter and family in St. Joseph, Michigan.

Vince established the Whirlpool Corporation’s department of service training in 1961. He served as its director for 20 years and retired from Whirlpool in 1983. Although Vince was unable to attend college during the Great Depression, in retirement he attended Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo and graduated with a bachelor’s degree in management engineering at the age of 78.

Many ASTD members had the pleasure of working with Vince during his countless years of service to ASTD. In addition to being the 1974 volunteer president, Vince served on the ASTD Board of Directors from 1971 to 1975 and again from 1977 to 1979. He was one of the original organizers of the International Federation of Training and Development Organizations (IFTDO) on behalf of ASTD.