

Are you REALLY Using the Four Levels?



By Don Kirkpatrick, PhD

Is This Article For You?

Are you REALLY using the four levels? Or are you singing the same World War II song, *Long Ago and Far Away*?

Level 4: Results

Level 3: Behavior

Level 2: Learning

Level 1: Reaction

Most of you probably know about the four levels. When people tell me that they are familiar with the four levels because they attended a Master's Degree class or attended a meeting where I spoke, I usually answer with the question, "Can you tell me what they are?" They stutter a little and almost always offer some excuse for not being able to state them. If that describes you, this article is *especially* for you.

Or are you a person who can state the four levels without hesitation? This article is aimed at you too. And even at those of you who can not only state the four levels, but also have evaluated at one or more of them. When I come to think of it, I guess that includes all professional trainers.

When I refer to "long ago and far away," I am referring to trainers who have been justifying their existence and reporting to management such items as, "During the past year, we have conducted 60 training conferences for a total of 650 hours to 1840 people. AND, we have received reaction sheets from nearly all of them and the ratings have been very high!"

Congratulations. You have mastered Level 1, REACTION.



I would guess that many managements have been impressed and offered congratulations because times were good and morale was high. Also, they were happy because they were probably getting informal reports that the participants were "satisfied" with their experience.

The Day of Reckoning Is Here

When I first originated the four levels, I included in one of my articles for the Journal of the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD), a statement that "someday there will be a day of reckoning" when the jury (top management) will be asking for more and better evidence that the training was paying off. And in most organizations, that "day of reckoning" has arrived.

In other words, the statistics of the number of people who have attended, the number of programs, and the number of training hours are of little concern.



The jury – those who approve budgets - wants information on:

- What the participants learned (Level 2)
- To what extent they have applied the learning on the job (Level 3)
- What results (Level 4) can be attributed to the programs

Another way of putting it is described in [Training on Trial](#), a new book by my son, Jim and his wife, Wendy. It will come out in September and will be published by AMACOM (American Management Association). Stay on our newsletter mailing list and you will receive advance information on the publication date.



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Getting Your Training Budget Approved

Are you going to be found guilty of not justifying the training budget?

Let me offer a few suggestions that may help the jury decide that you are “NOT GUILTY!” and the training budget is approved.

1. Understand and *be able to implement* the four levels. I have referenced our books at the end of the article in case you don't have one.
2. Continue to measure REACTION (I call it customer satisfaction) by using a well-constructed reaction sheet and possibly the use of a focus group.
3. Evaluate LEARNING, (knowledge, skills and attitudes), by using a well constructed “paper and pencil” test for measuring increase in knowledge and change in attitudes, and a performance test for evaluating increase in skills. A focus group can also be helpful.
4. Evaluate BEHAVIOR, the application of the learning to job performance. Levels 1 and 2 are under the direct control of the training department, but Levels 3 and 4 need management participation. This can be done through surveys and/or interviews, not only with the learner, but also with the manager of the learner and possibly the direct reports.
5. DO NOT SKIP Level 3 and jump to Level 4, as a person from a well-known tech company suggested. If you don't measure behavior, any results can't be tied to the training program and may be claimed by other change agents.
6. Evaluate RESULTS. This may be much easier than measuring Level 3 because a lot of pre-program data may be available. The challenge here is to provide evidence that the results actually came from the

training program and not from other sources.

A Simple Example

Let me give you a simple example to illustrate my recommendations. An organization was having 5-6% monthly turnover among new hires. The training department decided that it was due to the poor performance of the supervisors in orienting and training the new employees.

So, the training department designed a training program to teach the supervisors how to orient and train new employees. The goal was to reduce turnover to 1-2% per month. It was reached, and the training department was proud and claimed that the success was due to the training they conducted.



Someone asked: “Are you sure it was due to the training program?”, and stated three other possibilities for the reduction in the turnover rates: that the employment department was hiring different types of people; that the economic crisis meant that there were no other jobs available in the area; and/or that the company had given new benefits to the new hires.

In this case it would have been pretty easy to check on all three. If there was no change in any of them, then the training department should have received the credit.

Let me ask again, “Are you REALLY using the four levels?”

If “yes”, congratulations and keep doing it. If you answered, “I guess not,” we can help. And we can also help if you are not satisfied with the job you are doing.

Building Your Chain of Evidence

Reading one or more of the [Kirkpatrick books](#) is the first step. Each book describes the Four Levels and

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contains many cases of organizations that have implemented one or more of the levels. Read these case studies and see what you can use that applies to you. Feel free to copy or adapt any of the forms and procedures that were used. Forget about the results they received from their evaluations. Concentrate on what they did.

A final word. Do you remember the charges against Martha Stewart in the trial involving her activities in the stock market? She was convicted on the basis of a "chain of evidence" of her activities, and not on one activity alone.



I suggest that you too build a chain of evidence to justify your budget by **evaluating at all four levels.**

Don Kirkpatrick, PhD is Professor Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin and Honorary Chairman of Kirkpatrick Partners.

Don is the creator of the Kirkpatrick Four Levels, the foremost training evaluation tool in the world. Don is the author of *Improving Employee Performance Through Appraisal and Coaching*.

He is co-author with his son, Jim, of *Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels, Transferring Learning to Behavior, and Implementing the Four Levels*.

Don is a Past President of the American Society for Training and Development. He has been honored with the "Lifetime Achievement in Workplace Learning and Performance" from ASTD and is a member of the HRD Hall of Fame of Training Magazine.

Read more about Don at kirkpatrickpartners.com.