

If you decide to seek external knowledge, you need to be prepared.

Many business owners or HR professionals who are tasked with purchasing [training for their professional services firm](#) are inexperienced with the process. The training industry is fragmented. Choices range from large global vendors through to the thousands of small providers. Like all industries, vendors need to make money and are motivated by selling their wares. As there are no refunds when purchasing training, and training results can be difficult to quantify, selecting the right external training content can be a tricky task.

Training is not the same as consulting, coaching or outsourcing

Training is a specific solution to a specific problem. The first step, therefore, is to ensure that your training provider is actually providing *training*. Training is not [consulting or coaching](#).

- **Consulting** is used to provide a plan to improve a problem. It requires an ongoing relationship and observation of how actions affect circumstances over time. The outcome of consulting is often a documented process or recommendation, one of which *may be* staff training. Consulting often provides a recommended solution but doesn't change the behaviours or skills of existing staff.
- **Coaching** is used to help staff self-reflect and self-improve. While coaching may be 1:1, it can also be a small group where coaches 'help others to help themselves'. This might be after a training event, where coaches help participants overcome hurdles and embed behavioural change. Or it might be where the issue is not the staff members lack of skill, but a belief or attitude which is preventing their use of that skill.
- In contrast, **training** is a method to provide new skills. While creating habits is an ongoing process that will sometimes benefit from consulting or coaching, the knowledge-transfer that occurs during training can usually happen in a discrete time-frame. Training should have a defined end goal - whether it be a single day of workshops, two weeks of virtual sessions or a three-month online experience.

Training should also bring in new skills, knowledge and behaviours. Participants may contribute ideas, but training isn't an empty vessel. You are paying for new knowledge to be imported into your firm. Therein lies several potential traps for purchased training.

- If the content you are providing already exists within your firm, then the only value of the training is the learning process around it. You are otherwise paying for knowledge that you already have.
- If the content doesn't match your needs - suggests things which don't align with your

culture, processes, experience, clients, IT, industry, personalities, management structure, remuneration structure and so on - then the content will not stick. The training might be enjoyable and thought-provoking, but it won't

A final mistake is paying for 'exclusive training content'. There is very little actual exclusive content in any training course these days. Most sales training programs have very similar content. Most training content is available somewhere on the internet, and the movement of staff between firms and training providers ensures that training knowledge is also fluid. If you are paying extra for 'exclusive content', then you are probably overpaying.

The transfer of that training content is where the real value lies in such generic topics.

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Purchasing training is complicated - it's not like purchasing a product

To provide a suitable return on investment, a training program must address the needs of the participants as well as the expectations of the buyer. Therein lies our next potential problem. 'Standard' pricing often means 'off-the-shelf' training.

'Off-the-shelf' training is the same as 'one-size-fits-all'. Expecting this type of training to impact all the required needs effectively may be unrealistic.

Ideally, a good trainer will want to speak with the buyer (and perhaps the participants) to help understand the challenges faced at the firm, help uncover challenges, understand the desired outcomes, and get a sense of the budget and commitment of the firm to address these challenges.

This process will uncover any changes needed to the training program to increase its suitability - length, format, content, coaching, sessions, examples and more. And that all needs to fit within the budget of the firm.

This process is time-consuming and increases the costs from a 'standard' program. It also requires the firm to provide significant information to each possible training vendor and work with them to allow for a customised offering. You need to be prepared for this investment of time to obtain a return on your overall investment. You should expect some degree of back and forth with the training vendor. On the other hand, if all they offer is the 'standard package' then you might need to lower your expectations.

Subject matter experts are not the same as expert trainers

Let's contrast two scenarios.

First, we have a **large training company** that sells different types of training. This company offers a packaged curriculum that was purchased at some point, perhaps years ago. This training is often delivered by an experienced learning and development facilitator. They might have experience delivering all types of training packages but are unlikely to be a subject-matter expert on any of the training content.

Second, we have a **specialty training** firm which offers training around a single topic. This company is operated by subject matter experts who continually study that topic and use the techniques on a daily basis. Their content is frequently refined to keep pace with changing environments and technology. However, they may or may not be an expert trainer. They may have great content, but they may struggle to transfer it to others. Also, their system may be very dependent on their personality and background. It may work very well for some people but fail to resonate with others.

A large-scale training provider can be a convenient one-stop-shop when basic needs across multiple areas are to be addressed. However, when long-term adoption of new behaviours is required, a subject-matter expert can usually provide solutions with more significant impact. Pricing can be comparable, as the smaller firms tend to have fewer overheads and don't use hired facilitators.

Your participants should help drive training considerations

Finally, there are two factors outside the training itself, which will have a significant impact on the success of your training purchase.

First, the attitude of your participants towards training. For training to have lasting benefit, it requires the adoption of new behaviours. Bad attitudes towards training can stop those behaviours from forming. Participants who don't want to attend the training, for whatever reason, can often undermine the effectiveness of the program for themselves and for others. This means selecting a delivery method which appeals to your participants, as well as ensuring the content is relevant to participants. You should also seek a trainer who recognises the attitudes of the participants and is willing to provide advice on participant selection and engagement strategies.

The second factor is how your participants are supported in implementing new behaviours.

If participants are left to find the time to change on their own, the likelihood of change occurring falls significantly. If the training does not include strategies to help participants jump-start new behaviours, then you need to empower participants to make that time. This might mean involving management to reduce workload for those participants. In addition, the trainer should make implementation easy. The training must be practical with clear outcomes which can be implemented. Be wary of training that is just conceptual. Great training will involve learning transfer follow-up and ideally involvement from the participant's managers.

Purchasing training versus creating your own training

As you can see, the process of purchasing training is not a straight-forward one. There is considerable time, effort and risk involved in importing external training content into your professional services firm. That's not to say it's a bad idea. External training can be critical to fill knowledge gaps within a firm. It can also be convenient. However, it runs the risk of being a very easy way to spend a lot of money for little result.

Complementing external training, Tribal Habits and knowledge sharing platforms like it allow firms to drive training by utilising internal knowledge. This removes many of the risks associated with external training by providing training solutions which are a perfect fit for the firm - since the content comes from within and is already refined and proven to work!

Learning from peers who 'talk the talk' can also be an extremely engaging experience for participants. Modern knowledge sharing platforms like Tribal Habits also offer an end-to-end experience, including delivery, notifications, management engagement, reporting and on-the-job implementation.

And now that you have considered the work involved in selecting and managing external training, you can see that perhaps your time would be better spent unlocking all the valuable, proven, internal knowledge already within your firm.

Perhaps it's time to [start your free trial with Tribal Habits](#) now? You can get the best of both worlds - capture and use all your fantastic internal knowledge, and tap into our existing marketplace of ready-made topics when you do need external content to fill gaps.

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