

The New World Level 1 Reaction Sheets

By Jim Kirkpatrick, PhD



A Little Bit of Background



Don Kirkpatrick developed the four levels of evaluation in the mid 1950s. He coined the term 'reaction' back then to describe what soon came to be known as "Level 1." Don defines Level 1 (L1) as "The participants' reactions to a training event. It is basically a measure of (internal) customer satisfaction." Today, organizations around the world conduct some form of Level 1 using what they call "reaction sheets", "smile sheets", or "happy sheets". They are surveys typically administered immediately after the conclusion of any type of training event, and are either completed with 'paper and pencil' or online.

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These reaction sheets have been passed down through the generations, modified, automated, and are so common that many organizations simply refer to them as "evals." Much data and information can be gleaned from well-constructed reaction sheets to be used to either improve the training or supply evidence for the beginning stages of demonstrating the value of training to the bottom line.

I have a lot of experience in training evaluation, since I learned from the legend (my father, Don). Over the past few months, I have had a nagging feeling in the back of my mind about most L1 evaluations not quite hitting the mark. It was just yesterday, as a matter of fact, when the nagging feeling materialized into a crystal clear set of conclusions. In keeping with the Kirkpatrick four level approach, I shall start with the end in mind. It is time for a radical change in the way we construct Level 1 reaction sheets!

Trainers are some of the most caring people on the planet. Nothing makes them happier than to see training participants enjoy their training and learn the knowledge and skills that the program was designed to teach. Unfortunately, as a profession, we are quite self-centered. "Nonsense" you say? I shall not only provide you with compelling evidence as to the truth of that statement, but also provide a rather easy way out of our self-absorption. Why? To increase our effectiveness to our business partners.

Reality Check: Where Are We Today?

Take a look at your Level 1 reaction sheet. Go on. I dare you. I will bet that you will find that it is mostly about *us* and *our* environment. Check for phrases like:

"The facility was..."

"The facilitator..."

"The exercises were..."

"The materials were ..."



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Do you want some more?

“The course content was...”

“Which of the topics covered were...”

“Which of the methodologies were...”

You may not get where I am going, but you will. What we do is to ask participants – our customers – their thoughts about us and our methods, our buildings, and our coffee. Instead, we should be asking them about *them* – and how *they* are experiencing the training event in relation to *their* needs.

New Level 1 Reaction Sheet Questions

Below, I have developed a chart that will, hopefully, show you what I mean. I have differentiated these two contrasting approaches as ‘trainer-centered, and learner-centered. Please assume for me, if you will, a four point Likert scale for each question defined by the terms, ‘strongly disagree’, ‘disagree’, ‘agree’, and ‘strongly agree’.

Evaluation Category	Trainer-centered	Learner-centered
Program objectives	<p>The program objectives were clearly defined.</p> <p>The program objectives were covered by the instructor.</p> <p>The material was the right level of complexity for my background.</p>	<p>I understood the learning objectives.</p> <p>I was able to relate each of the learning objectives to the learning I achieved.</p> <p>I was appropriately challenged by the material.</p>
Course materials	<p>The course materials were well organized.</p> <p>The course materials complemented the course content.</p>	<p>I found the course materials easy to navigate.</p> <p>I felt that the course materials will be essential for my success.</p>
Content relevance	<p>The material was relevant to my needs.</p>	<p>I will be able to immediately apply what I learned.</p>
Facilitator knowledge	<p>The facilitator demonstrated a good understanding of the material.</p> <p>The facilitator shared his/her experiences in regards to the content.</p>	<p>My learning was enhanced by the knowledge of the facilitator.</p> <p>My learning was enhanced by the experiences shared by the facilitator.</p>

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Facilitator delivery	<p>The facilitator effectively delivered the program material.</p> <p>The facilitator did a good job of generating participant interaction.</p> <p>The facilitator used a good variety of instructional methods.</p> <p>The pace of the program was good.</p> <p>The duration of the session was good.</p>	<p>I was well engaged during the session.</p> <p>It was easy for me to get actively involved during the session.</p> <p>I was comfortable with the pace of the program.</p> <p>I was comfortable with the duration of the session.</p>
Facilitator style	<p>The facilitator managed the program well.</p> <p>The facilitator allowed for questions during the program.</p> <p>The exercises and activities were useful.</p>	<p>I was well engaged during the session.</p> <p>I was given ample opportunity to get answers to my questions.</p> <p>I was given ample opportunity to practice the skills I am asked to learn.</p>
Program evaluation	<p>The test was a fair representation of the program content.</p> <p>The role-plays or simulations were a fair representation of the program content.</p>	<p>I was given ample opportunity to demonstrate my knowledge.</p> <p>I was given ample opportunity to demonstrate my skills.</p>
Breaks	<p>The breaks were spaced at the right times during the session.</p>	<p>I felt refreshed after the breaks.</p>
Facility	<p>The lighting was adequate.</p> <p>The temperature was comfortable.</p> <p>The coffee was hot 😊</p>	<p>I found the room atmosphere to be comfortable.</p> <p>I was pleased with the room set-up.</p> <p>I experienced minimal distractions during the session.</p>

I trust you see where I am coming from. I am tempted to say, “shame on us for making training so much about us”, and I guess I just did. Learners have enough trouble with thinking that they are being “sent” to training as a reward, punishment, or to earn a checkmark on some training activity sheet. Well, that is half of my argument that reaction sheets tend to be strongly trainer-centered. Now for the other half.

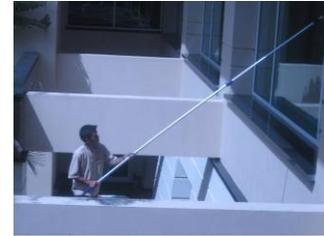
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Looking to the Ultimate Purpose of Training

I would like to begin this section with a contrasting story of professional window washers. As I write this, I am in Kuala Lumpur conducting evaluation training for my company, SMR USA, Inc. Several days ago, I was in Brunei staying at an upscale property called *The Empire Resort and Spa*. During a break, I was walking and came upon a young man up on a lift, reaching up with a long pole to wash windows high up on one of the resort's buildings. I asked him, "*Young fellow, what is your job here?*" He stopped what he was doing, turned to me, smiled, and looked me square in the eye and answered,



"I am helping to make for a memorable experience for my hotel's guest!"

Wow! Was I impressed.

Today, at the hotel I am staying in here in Malaysia, I happened upon another window washer and asked him the same question. Without turning to me, he simply replied,



"I am a window washer,"

and went back to his work.

What was the difference between these two workers? It is precisely the difference that *we as training professionals* need to strive to make in each and every learner who passes through our influence. What I am getting at is this. Presently, our reaction sheets, and unfortunately most of our training, stop at either Level 1 or Level 2 (learning). We are all about gathering information to help *us*. And well we should. But there are also things we can do to make Level 1 about helping *our participants* as well. We either forget or never figured out that our job should be to instill in the learner that they are choosing to come our training to learn new knowledge and skills in order to perform their jobs (Level 3) more effectively, in order to make a contribution not only to the business, but also to their own futures (Level 4).

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Somehow, the Brunei window washer got that. I strongly suspect that along with a strong sense of internal pride, he also had some excellent training and coaching that reinforced his value and contribution to the bottom line – the customer experience.

It is my contention that it is our job – our duty – to do what we can to instill this sense of ultimate purpose. Currently, our Level 1 reaction sheets do little or nothing to even provide a hint that that is the ultimate purpose of our participants' purpose in coming to training. Goodness knows we need all the help we get with providing evidence to our business stakeholders of our value to the business.

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More Level 1 Enhancements

Here are some specific suggested Likert-style additions that I urge you to consider adding to your current reaction sheet in order to enhance it:

"I understood the objectives that were outlined during the course." (L2)

"I am clear about what is expected of me as a result of going through this training" (L3)

"I will be able to apply on the job what I learned during this session." (L3)

"I do not anticipate any barriers to applying what I learned." (L3)

"I anticipate that I will eventually see positive results as a result of my efforts." (L4)

Do you want to supercharge your Level 1s? Keep the ever-popular questions regarding what the participants liked and didn't like, but consider adding some or all of the following to really get the point across.

"What were the three most important things you learned from this session?"

"From what you learned, what do you plan to apply back at your job?"

"What kind of help might you need to apply what you learned?"

"What barriers do you anticipate you might encounter as you attempt to put these new skills into practice?"

"What ideas do you have for overcoming the barriers you mentioned?"

"What ultimate impact do you think you might contribute to the organization as you successfully apply what you learned?"

As I mentioned earlier, trainers are some of the most caring people on the planet. Apply some or all of these principles and you will go a long way to actually showing that, and might just end up with an organization full of motivated Brunei window washers!

Jim Kirkpatrick, PhD is a Senior Consultant with Kirkpatrick Partners. He facilitates workshops and provides consulting to Fortune 500 companies around the world. Jim's specialty is the Kirkpatrick Business Partnership Model™.

Jim has co-written three books with his father, Don Kirkpatrick, the creator of the Kirkpatrick Four Levels. He has written two other books with his wife, Wendy: [Kirkpatrick Then and Now](#) (2009, Kirkpatrick Publishing) and [Training on Trial](#) (2010, AMACOM Books).

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