



## Four Things You Can Do During the Economic Downturn

By Jay B. Bowden  
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We are not in the "*best of times*" ...we're in a beleaguered industry. In addition, economic conditions dictate restraint, if not all-out cutbacks. But the dust seems to be settling with even a few rays of hope.

Unfortunately, Human Resources and specifically training, often pay an exaggerated price during down turns. Training budgets and initiatives are early "cuts", which include staff. To add to the problem, training initiatives are often the last to be replaced. In effect, training often pays a higher price for down turns and budget cuts than other areas.

What concerns me the most is the *organizational effect*. To paraphrase a school bumper sticker, if you think training is expensive, wait until you see what the lack of training does! Lack of cross selling, increases in fraud loss, loss of potential revenue, increase in system time and errors, and much more can be directly attributed to the lack of training. Unfortunately, they are either not measured in a way that amplifies the problem, or because a relationship is not obvious. Either way, training should buffer itself during down turns, not for self-defense, but for the benefit of the organization.

Here are the four things you can do during the current conditions:

First, evaluate the programs and initiatives that you had to reduce, or even eliminate when your budget was cut. What has been the effect? Can you now justify it as strongly as before the budget cuts? Has it increased or decreased in its value to the organization now that you have had a chance to reflect? Maybe you will determine that some of your courses and initiatives are less significant than you thought, or possibly have increased in stature. Either way, it's a great opportunity to evaluate them.

Second, rethink your strategy of justifying training. Are you proactive or reactive? Do you anticipate needs and promote data and measurements, or do you react to requests and more obvious requirements? The downturn may have given you a "fresh start" where you can make a greater case for longer term effectiveness, rather than be a "course provider".

Third, it is time for an internal "cleaning". Of those courses, programs, and initiatives that have been around a while, when was the last time you evaluated their effectiveness? Upgraded their technology? Examined their learner impact? Or scrutinized their facilitation? It is natural for us to avoid what "ain't broke", but consider it an annual requirement to evaluate and reprioritize your existing training. The economic down turn gives you a good excuse to start an annual process.

Fourth and lastly, give yourself a good "gut check". Analyze your own performance. How did you address the cuts? Were you positive and proactive or were you negative and protective? Did you show leadership or avoidance? What have you learned from these economic conditions and how can you use it to improve your own performance in the future?

While nobody wants these economic conditions and the effect that it has on training, it doesn't mean that it won't have peripheral benefits. Critically analyze each of the four suggested areas, and you may make a long lasting affect on your organization, your learner, and you!