

# The Beginner's Guide to Reinforcement

Everything you need to know about training reinforcement  
and how to change your learners' behaviors.



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the leader in training reinforcement

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# 01/ INTRODUCTION

Everything you need to know about training reinforcement

**Did you know that only 44% of organizations surveyed provided “post-training reinforcement of content presented in initial educational sessions”?**

70% of training provided is still full days of instructor-led courses and elearning comes often in big chunks. Organizations typically prefer shorter courses so their employees are not away from job responsibilities for too long.

With the emergence of training reinforcement, the effectiveness of training has been greatly improved. Trainers stay in touch well past their training events, creating a culture of continuous learning. Knowledge retention increases and behaviors change for the better.

This eBook will cover the basics of training reinforcement. By the end, you'll know:

- What training reinforcement is and how it works
- The 2 primary ways reinforcement can help your business
- Best practices for getting started, running, measuring and optimizing performance during your reinforcement program.
- 7 myths about training reinforcement

# What is Training Reinforcement?

## WHAT IS TRAINING REINFORCEMENT & WHY IS IT BENEFICIAL

If you were to look at your training, how effective would you say it is? How many of your learners remember more than 70% of the knowledge and skills learned during training? And how many of those learners actively changed their behaviors to increase their productivity and effectiveness?

Chances are, very few of your learners have changed their behaviors to match your organization's learning objectives.

Reinforcing knowledge and skills is a process. Studies have shown that learners remember around 50% of training five weeks after training has ended. Another study on training (by ATD) found that only 1% of a typical workweek is spent on training and development.

But training reinforcement helps you tackle this problem head on. It allows you to take your current training material, break it into bite-sized reinforcement messages, and send it to your

learners for a period of time after training has ended. This means you can be very strategic and efficient about where you make changes to your training program and where you spend your training dollars.



### What is Training Reinforcement?

The Ebbinghaus Curve is often used to explain reinforcement. But Reinforcement is so much more. The Ebbinghaus Curve only displayed the percentage of a topic that we remember after repeatedly paying attention to it.

Remembering something is not the same as using it. That's where it all starts. In a result-driven reinforcement course, the application and implementation of the learned materials are the most important. Remembering is, of course, part of that.

For example, you can train your learners on the importance of wearing safety helmets on a construction site. With the help of the Ebbinghaus Curve, you can help your learners remember information from your training course, but this doesn't mean that they will actually wear the helmet. That has to do with behavior change, and that's the basis of reinforcement.

Almost everyone has forgotten something, whether it is as simple as where you put your keys or as unnerving as walking into a classroom with no memory that a major test was scheduled.

### Who is Hermann Ebbinghaus?

Important or not, forgetting something often causes people to question what is wrong with their memory, though most often there is absolutely nothing amiss. One of the first people to study the process of forgetting was a psychologist named Hermann Ebbinghaus. Ebbinghaus contributed many viable ideas to the field of psychology through his experimentation with learning and forgetting, and these ideas are still applicable today.



Ebbinghaus hypothesized the idea that it is much harder for learners to retain information that is not meaningful. He also hypothesized that re-learning material is easier after the first time and that it takes longer to forget material after re-learning it.

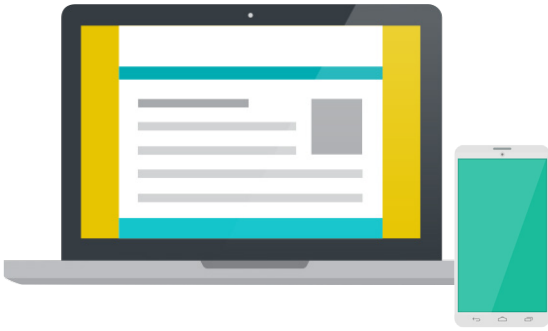
Finally, Ebbinghaus hypothesized that a learner will have greater success if learning is spread out over a longer period of time instead of short burst of over learning.

### Ebbinghaus and Reinforcement

Ebbinghaus' ideas are used as the basis for reinforcement. A well-crafted reinforcement course spreads meaningful material out over a longer period of time and is combined constructively into a reinforcement timeline. Over time, the learning materials are repeated using the spacing effect for increased uptake.

## Reinforcement provides two primary benefits

### IT MAXIMIZES YOUR TRAINING ROI AND HELPS CHANGE YOUR LEARNERS' BEHAVIORS



**Reinforcement is a powerful tactic that helps maximize your training ROI.**

In the area of post-training, no other tactics offer the return that training reinforcement does.

Reinforcement offers the most effective way to:

- Reconnect with your learners and keep the training at the forefront of their mind
- Recapture the attention of your learners with short, bite-sized reinforcement messages
- Increase your participants' knowledge retention
- Change your learners' behaviors to better match your organization's learning and training reinforcement objectives

Reinforcement is a great tactic that increases the effect of your training with knowledge retention and behavior change.

When trainers think of reinforcement, they often think of small reminders being sent after training has ended but that is not reinforcement. One of the greatest benefits to reinforcement is its ability to change your learners' behaviors.

***"Without behavior change, you're not reinforcing; you are only reminding."***

**- Antonie Wurth, Mindmarker**

It's important to make the distinction between reminder services and training reinforcement. Reminder services only increase knowledge retention; reinforcement increases knowledge retention AND changes learners' behaviors. Keep reading to learn exactly how it does this!

## 02/

# HOW REINFORCEMENT WORKS

Reinforcement vs Reminder Services: What's the Difference?

**How is reinforcement different that reminder services and why is it important to know?**

Let's get into the mechanics of reminder services and training reinforcement. We'll break down exactly how they work and how they differ.

### **How Reminder Services Work**

If your training has been integrated into one of the major learning management system (LMS) providers, you probably have access to some type of reminder service as part of your package.

Reminder services are typically viewed as an additional tool used to help increase the knowledge learned during training. There are many different methods on how this is achieved:

- Email reminders
- Text messages
- LMS-based reminders
- eLearning software

Reminder messages can contain small snippets of training material that is used to help refresh the learner's memory, increasing their knowledge retention. Messages are sent on a pre-determined schedule, such as "every Wednesday at 3:00PM Eastern."

Administrators and stakeholders are then able to log into their dashboard and see who is actively checking their reminders, how many reminders they have viewed, and where they are in the post-training reminder process.

### How Training Reinforcement Works

In its most basic form, training reinforcement is a solution that uses your current training material, learning objectives, and reinforcement goals to reinforce important skills and knowledge learned during a training event or course.

Your current content is used to create a goal-based reinforcement timeline (or story) that is filled with small bite-sized reinforcement messages.

Reinforcement messages aren't your training material broken into smaller pieces.

Like in any good course, your reinforcement program needs to be broken into learning phases:

The 3 phases of are:

1. Awareness
2. Knowledge and skills
3. Behavior change

For every goal you have. This can implicate that messages for one goal are still in the awareness stage but for other areas in skills or behavior change.

Reinforcement messages are specifically created for the reinforcement program at hand. Each message is expertly crafted and placed on your reinforcement program's timeline according to above phases. This timeline helps guide your learners through a 'story' that increases their

knowledge and creates measurable behavior change.

Training reinforcement timelines pay close attention to your learners and their schedules during the day. When are they busy and when do their schedules slow down?



Timing plays a critical role in what type of reinforcement message is sent to your learners. Critical thinking messages are usually sent when your learners are the busiest, while surveys and opinion messages are sent during slower parts of the day.



Training reinforcement programs generally come with analytics, allowing you to review your learners' answers. Analytics allow you to dive deeper into your reinforcement program, reviewing survey questions and creating actionable intelligence.

Actionable intelligence is reinforcement data turned into business intelligence that can then be used to make decisions for your organization and/or its training program. Analytics help you increase your training effectiveness by showing you exactly what is happening during reinforcement and why.

### **How Training Reinforcement is Beneficial**

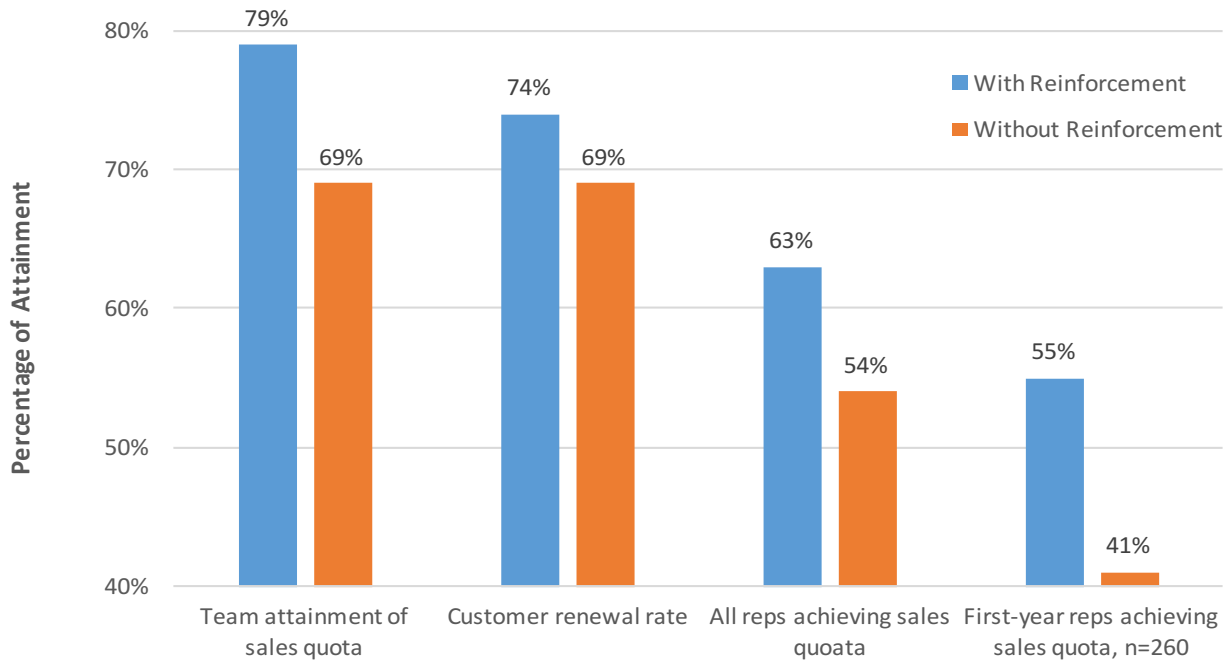
The benefits on training reinforcement are ongoing. According to the Aberdeen Group, top performing companies emphasize post training reinforcement more than others firms and report higher adoption of additional management capabilities.

Training reinforcement leads to better training practices, which creates superior performance results.

Aberdeen Group researched the differences between companies considered "post-training reinforcers" versus all others. In their research, they found that post-training reinforcers were more likely to:

- Have a central repository of tools available for reps and managers
- Actively seek knowledge from seasoned staff for future use
- Have user-generated sales and marketing content available for reps and managers
- Identify subject matter experts within their team

With billions of dollars being spent on training every year, it's important that you get the highest ROI for your training dollars.



Source: Aberdeen Group, 2015

Did you know that according to one study, without a reinforcement plan in place, only 50% of knowledge is retained after 5 weeks? After 90 days, more than 84% of what was originally learned is lost. The loss of knowledge can cause on-the-job issues and decrease the productivity of your learners.

A fully integrated training reinforcement program is needed to help decrease the amount of knowledge that is lost post training.

# 03/

## TRAINING REINFORCEMENT MYTHS

7 myths about training reinforcement you may have heard

**Training reinforcement is much more than the Forgetting Curve.**

Training reinforcement is the continuous reinforcement of course material post-training. Reinforcement programs are crafted using your learning objectives and expected behavior outcomes with the ultimate goal of increasing knowledge retention and changing learners' behaviors.

Included below are 7 myths and misconceptions about training reinforcement that we've heard often over the last few years:



## 1. Reinforcement is the same as the Forgetting Curve

Reinforcement is not the Forgetting Curve. Although reinforcement is based on principles discovered by Ebbinghaus, there are many other principles necessary for a successful reinforcement program.



## 2. Reinforcement takes a lot of my learners' time

A well-crafted reinforcement program will only take less than 1 % of your learners' time to complete each week. The continuous learning and power of story lines help create lasting impact.

## 3. Reinforcement should start a few weeks/months after training

The best time to start your reinforcement program is directly after training. After the first couple of days, retention rates begin to drop below 80%. After 30 days, retention rates are less than 65%. A good reinforcement program will connect with the training and continue the process of learning well after training has ended.

## 4. Reinforcement has to be fun

Reinforcement can be fun! Training reinforcement messages should be quick, meaningful, and based on your reinforcement objectives. A good reinforcement program will deliver content at the right time to support behavior change.

Gamification elements are used to help increase engagement, such as scores, participant status, and reinforcement progress.



## 5. Reinforcement is focused only on my learning

Does reinforcement focus on learning? Yes, but it also focuses on addressing 5 common training gaps. Closing these gaps help participants grow and apply their new knowledge and skills.

## 6. Reinforcement messages should only be sent once a month

It's not an effective strategy to only send one reinforcement message per month. Reinforcement relies on continuous learning to make improvements in knowledge retention and behavior change. Instead of sending one reinforcement message each month, limit the length of each message, requiring no more than 2 minutes per message, and send them multiple times a week.



## 7. The best time to receive reinforcement messages is in the morning

Although the morning is a good time to send some reinforcement messages, timing really depends on the type of reinforcement message. Knowledge questions are usually sent during busier times of the day, with reflection questions sent during slower times. Each reinforcement message has a certain value to the overall results. It's important to pay attention to timing when creating a reinforcement program.

# 04/ CONCLUSION

Get started today!

*“Without behavior change, you are only reminding; you are not reinforcing.”*

Anthonie Wurth,  
Mindmarker Founder & CLO

Training reinforcement is an incredibly powerful tool that will take your organization's training and increase its effectiveness. It should become an essential part of your learning culture.

It not only allows you to refresh and reinforce material learned during training, it also gives you the opportunity to create measurable, lasting behavior change.

We hope this guide was helpful in providing you with an overview of what training reinforcement is, how it differs from reminder services, and why your organization needs reinforcement!

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