

All aboard for training

The time might be right for you to get your skill development on track, writes **Sue White**.

If you are keen to hone your skills at work, it can pay to keep a close eye on the calendar. The recent beginning of the financial year brought new budgets, which means now is the time to start sniffing around your company's training budget.

But before you get carried away with fantasies about \$5000 that might be sitting in the coffers earmarked for your development, it's good to understand how most companies approach staff training.

"They tend to look at an overall spend rather than focusing on individuals," says the director of registered training organisation Aegis Aspire, Wendy Bonnici.

"But more likely, they'll sit down and look at their goals, what skills

people need, what the gap is and what it'll cost to close that gap."

According to recent research from the recruitment and human resources services company Randstad, 65 per cent of us believe our employer provides the training opportunities we need.

For the remaining 35 per cent of us who are keen for extra support, it pays to approach the issue strategically.

"It's about looking at your career goals, figuring out your skill gaps and selling the reasons for any required training to your manager," says the general manager of HR Consulting at Randstad, Kellie Rigg.

She believes individual development plans make a real difference. "I see companies

putting everyone through the same training, even though each staff member has different needs," she says.

"It's better to identify skill gaps and know that the objectives and outcomes of those training courses will meet them."

Once you have taken the time for some reflection and planning, Bonnici suggests, arrange a meeting with your manager to discuss career development.

Of course, career development is not only achieved by spending money on a formal training course. Your manager might be able to help you to get the mix right.

"You can grow at work through secondments, participating in particular projects, receiving great quality mentoring or even coaching," Bonnici says.

Once your training program is under way, you can usually expect a pay-off in both the short and long term.

When it comes to the day of training, employers and employees are equally responsible for making sure the investment pays off.

"Before you go, you want to be able to have a conversation with your manager about benchmarking

your skills now and then testing them three and six months after the learning journey," Rigg says. "You'll feel good about how you've improved but the business will also see that it makes good sense and be more likely to do it again."

Overall, it pays to approach any training on offer as an opportunity rather than an imposition that's taking you away from more pressing work.

"You can see the people who aren't making the most of the opportunity; they're at the back of the room checking their BlackBerry," Rigg says.

Managers can help, too, by making sure team members can head off to training commitments without distractions. They should try to create an environment in which those going to training have the space to concentrate and focus while they are there, rather than worry about what's going on back in the office, Rigg says.

If your company is reluctant to send you to training, it may be because it missed some positive news coming out of the recent federal budget.

The federal government has committed more than \$3 billion towards training Australia's

workforce during the next six years. "It's a massive amount of money," Bonnici says.

As a registered training organisation, part of Aegis Aspire's role is to help companies, large and small, leverage government funding frameworks.

"By helping companies design and map their training against a nationally recognised qualification, they can then tap into government funding to help offset the spend," she says.

When you land back in the office after a day or a week away on a course, make sure you remember to share what you've learnt.

"Come back and have a conversation about it," Bonnici says. "That reinforces the learning and gives leaders confidence it was valuable."

And if it was not so good? You should still speak up.

"There would be nothing worse than going on a course that's terrible, not saying anything and others keep getting sent on it too," Bonnici says.

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Get involved ... Wendy Bonnici, of Aegis Aspire.
Photo: Rodger Cummins

MAXIMISE YOUR TIME

Before you go

- Have a strategy – choose courses that fit your long-term goals as well as the organisation's.
- Sit with your manager to work out a plan.
- Suggest benchmarking your progress before and after.

On the day

- Set things up so you can stay focused on learning, rather than

wondering what is piling up back at the office.

After training

- Report back at your next team meeting. It will keep the learning fresh for you and add value to your organisation.
- Follow up on your promise to benchmark your progress by checking in with your manager a few months after training.