

Training and Professional Development in an IT Community

George William Herbert
Taos, Inc.
gherbert@taos.com

Studies show...

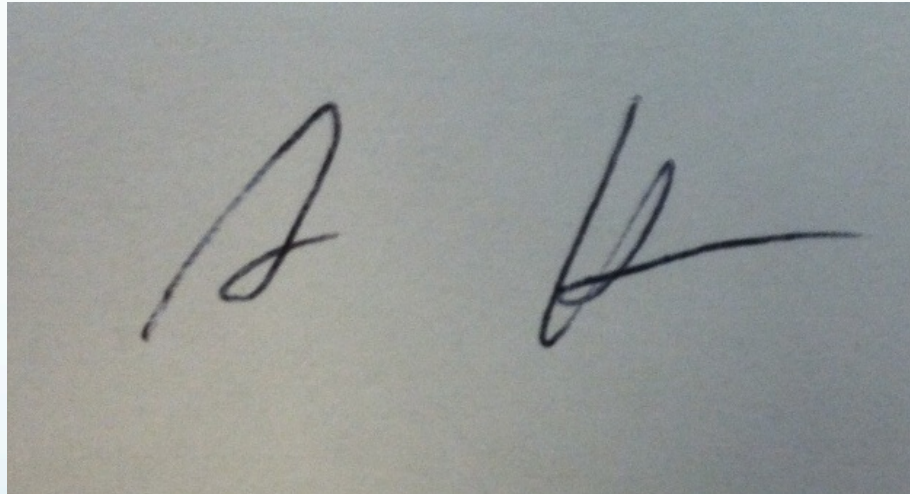
- ...that the worst thing a presenter can do is have the same words they're saying on the slide they're showing.

Why is Professional Development important?

- For you:
 - Career advancement
 - Intellectual challenge
- For your employers:
 - More capable employees...
 - ...who will stay longer
- For the field as a whole:
 - Adoption rate of new technologies gated by you
 - Invention rate of new technologies...

This is a Practice and Experience Report

- Not enough numbers, yet.
- Problem:



Telling you a story

- It's about people, not computers
- Want you to tell a story later

Who: The Community

- Consulting / Contracting IT workers
- Hundreds of technical staff
- One major geographical region (SF Bay Area)

When and What

- Three major time periods:
 - 1980s-2004
 - 2004-2008
 - 2008 and on

First 15 years

- Going back to late 1980s, through 2004ish
- A lot of: Professional Development Reimbursement (PDR), Expert Presentations
 - Some: Peer Mentoring, Self-paced training between assignments, Staff Management, Internal informal technical escalation support network

Results

- Peer mentoring: zzz
- Self-paced training: zzz
- Staff management: !
- Escalation support: !
- PDR: !
- Expert Presentations: !

2004-8

- Expert presentations changed to:
 - “Office Hours” – 1-day 1-topic talks, internal or external experts or round tables, weekly
 - Longer training classes (2-12 class sessions over weeks)
- Annual technical reviews standardized
 - Our interview process re-applied to existing employees
 - Secret sauce involved

2008 and on

- Ouch
 - Industry and economy-wide ouch
 - Consultants ancedotally wanted more training / PD
- Economy down – in 2009:
 - PDR temporarily suspended
 - Training temporarily suspended
 - Office hours continued, along with informal PD
 - Company moved further from major freeway
- Attempt at video distribution of training
- Safari accounts for all

2008-2009 effects

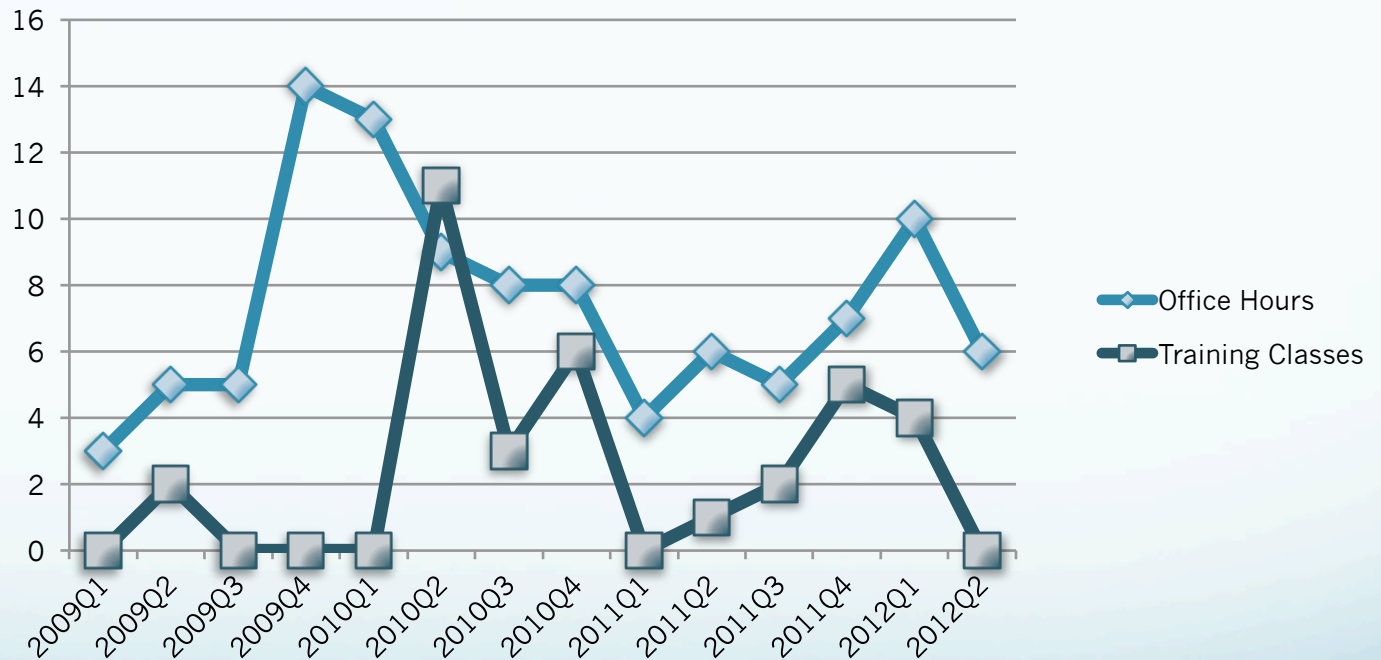
- Attendance down at events after move, harder to get to HQ
- Video distribution didn't work.
 - Should've used WebEx or YouTube.
- Internal website needed refresh, didn't get it
- 2012: Attendance at "office hours" down, we changed to shorter more structured classes

Some data

- Data analysis of 2009 to mid-2012

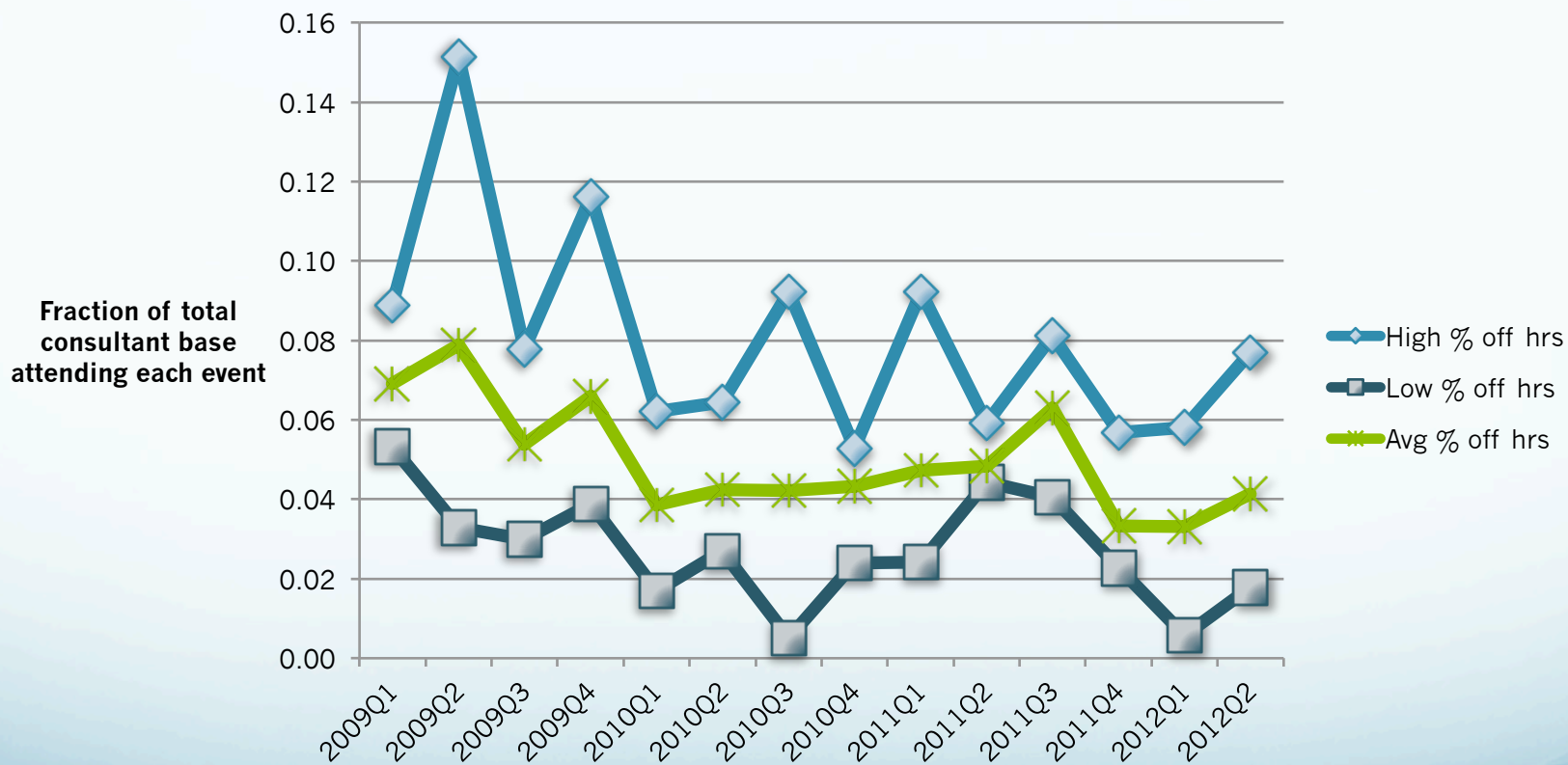
Number of events

Fig. 1 Training and Office Hours Events



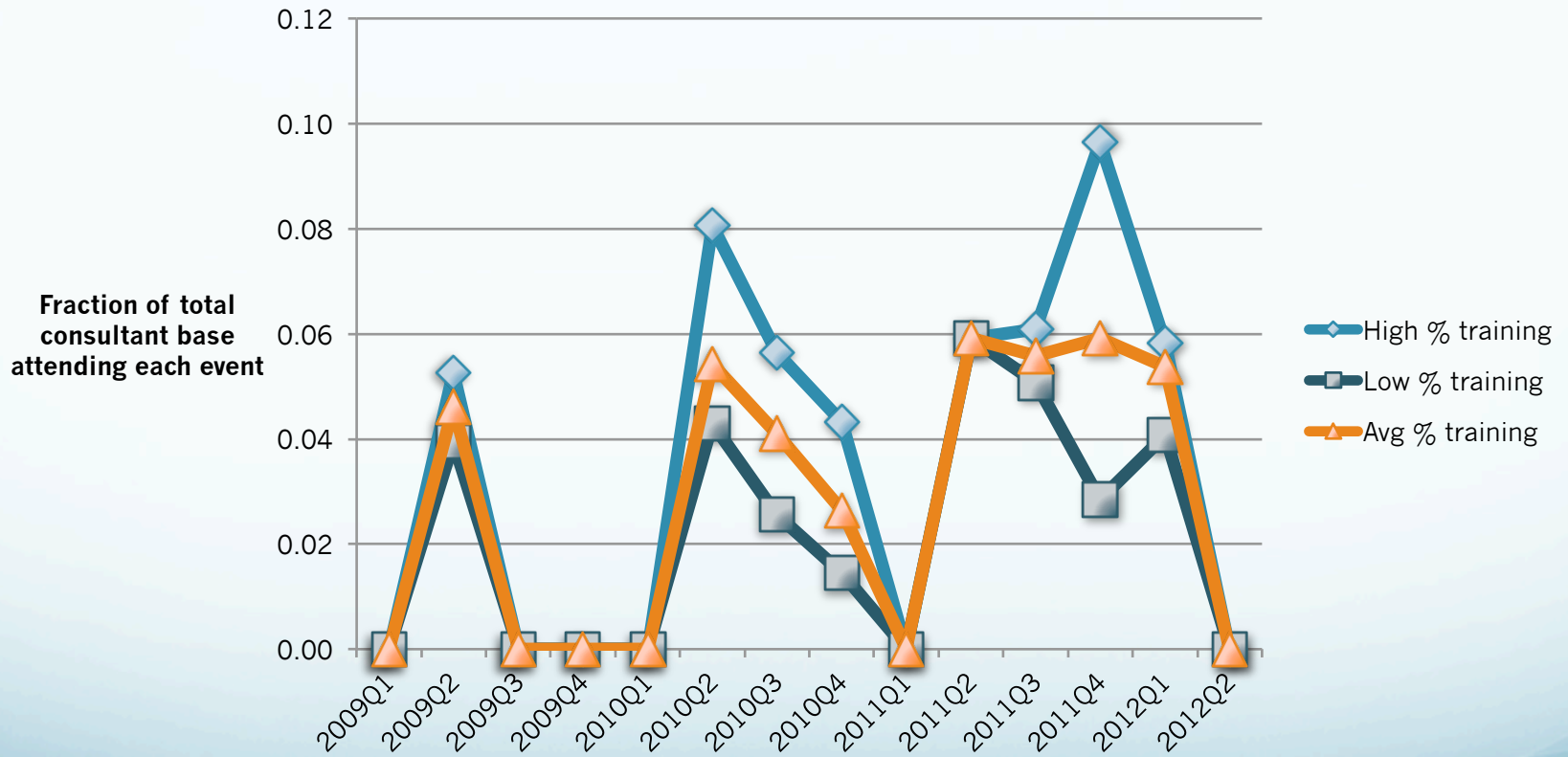
Office Hours attendance

Fig. 2 Office Hours Attendance



Training class attendance

Fig. 3 Training Event Attendance



PD Spending

Fig. 4 Total per-consultant PD costs



Additional attendance statistics

- Approximately half of the consultants showed up at least once over 14 quarters
- Total attendance over 14 quarters was 7 times headcount
- 137 total events (103 office hours, 34 training classes) with 1142 attendees (837 office hours, 305 training classes).

Results and Benefits

- A lot of people are engaged with the training and office hours and other professional development
- Those people seem to stay longer and advance faster professionally
- Those people cite the PD as a reason to come to the company and stay with it
- Wish we had better numbers. This is anecdotal. Macro to micro is a data gap.

Participation

- Some people show up a lot, are very motivated
 - They probably self-train if you don't train them
- Some people show up a little, are somewhat motivated
 - They probably don't self-train that much if you don't
- Some people can be badgered into showing up
 - They don't self-train that much
- Some people don't show up
 - Not training themselves much at all

Things that work

- Annual technical reviews
- Weekly or biweekly staff-led “office hours”
- Longer staff-led training courses
- Escalation support structure
- Videotaping and COTS distribution
- Professional development reimbursements
- Safari accounts

Lessons Learned

- Track attendance by a better method than scrawled signatures. As you go along, on a computer.
- People aren't using all their PDR, even highly self-motivated learners.

Future Research

- Attendance back to 2004, perhaps 2000 or earlier
 - We have the data, just need to dig it up
- Individual attendance records
 - We have the data, but need to decipher it
- Correlating attendance with performance
 - How effective?

Strategy that works

- Do events regularly.
- Keep trying new things. Some old things stop working, some new things don't work. But many do.

...And a challenge

- We did this. We're not supermen. We used our smartest people to think about it and lead it, but you have smart people too
- If you're at LISA you're a smart leader. So...
- So, go start a local training / professional development program!
- Stick with it
- Track the results. Talk about them.
- You win! We all win!