So, does it? Does it deserve to exist in order to fix a problem? In many cases the answer is 'no'. Let's list some problems that training can't fix, identify why training used to 'fix' them anyway, and what a better method of choosing a solution might be.

Organizations frequently use training as a 'super solution' to eliminate performance gaps. However, performance gaps frequently have one or more root causes that are poorly addressed (if at all) by any kind of training:

- Employee motivation
- Job or task design
- Broken or poorly implemented processes
- Work flows
- Organizational structure
- Poor or mis-matched incentives
- Inconsistent or lax enforcement of current policy and procedure
- Poor information systems

Training is only well suited to address the issue of **lack of skills and knowledge**. Used to 'fix' any of the other foregoing issues, training will have minimal impact at best.

Why then, does training so often become the designated 'solution' to a performance gap? Many reasons:

- We're familiar with the concept of training and we're comfortable with it. We've all done it: from elementary school through high school to college or university and then into the workforce where we're bombarded with seminars, webinars, instructor led courses, eLearning, coaching, and more. It's not new, and it's not scary.
- We 'know' training so we think we understand how to use it. We are so familiar with the concept of being 'taught' that it's almost the first tool we reach for. Stated another way, if 'training' is your preferred or only solution, every problem looks like a training problem.
- It's assumed that training is a good thing. Training departments exist for a reason, right?

They do good work and produce good courses, so it's obvious that training is valuable, right?

- Management has requested training (or designated training) as the solution. So that's the solution that will be developed and implemented.

A better solution process, when deciding whether training should be created, is to ask three questions posed by Cathy Moore:

- What are my people (students, learners, workers, employees, etc) supposed to be doing?

- Why are they not doing it?
- Will training make them do it, or make them do it better?

The first two questions are key and more often than not will supply the answer to the third. So how do you answer the first two questions?

In a word, 'analysis'.   The rush to training always assumes the issue of one of lack of skills and knowledge (because that is what training addresses).   Selection of training assumes the root cause is known.

 Analysis may validate that assumption, often it will point out different issues that need to be addressed.

To determine what it is your people are supposed to be doing, ask yourself, what are the organization's top level goals? Every organization has top level goals, a set overarching objectives that drive sub goals throughout its units, departments, or divisions. These goals in turn drive desired behaviours. Every position within an organization has desired performance behaviours, from CEO all the way down to shelf-stocker. They are usually identified within a job description for larger organizations. Smaller, fast growing entities may have these desired behaviours locked up inside the principles' heads. Nonetheless, they do exist and once identified (a subject worthy of a separate article) they allow the identification of performance gaps.

A performance gap is merely the difference between an observed behaviour and the desired behaviour. It's this point many organizations stop and reach for training. They've identified that a problem exists, and implicitly assume the issue is a lack of skills and knowledge.

Instead, they should proceed to the next question: Why aren't the performers doing what they are supposed to be doing? The root cause (or causes) must be ferreted out. The analysis does not have to take a lot of time and effort, but it does require good information and objectivity.

A good start may be made by asking the question 'Why?' Why does something happen, or not happen? Once that answer is found, ask 'why' again to dig beneath that answer.

Joe Wilmore gives an excellent example of this technique in his book Performance Basics . To paraphrase:

Imagine an organization in which 20% of the doors in the building are left unlocked and unchecked after hours by the security guards.

Asking 'why' establishes that the doors are left unlocked and unchecked because security guards either think the doors have already been checked, or lose track of which ones have been checked. So why does this happen? The guards are sleepy and therefore have poor short term memory. Why are they sleepy? Many of the guards work multiple shifts doing security both at this organization and another shift at a different company. Why do many work multiple shifts? They need the money because the job pays so poorly.

As Joe suggests, the solution probably lies in either paying the guards more, so they do not need to work extra shifts, or hiring only those people who would likely work only a single shift and thus get enough sleep.

Notice that training **is not** the suggested solution, but it might well have been tried anyway, had the analysis stopped with the problem identification.

So the next time you think you need to have a course developed, stop and ask yourself why. You may find that all you really need is a job aide. Or more sleep.

References and Further Reading:

[Performance Basics](#) by Joe Willmore

[The Big Mistake in eLearning](#) by Cathy Moore (A YouTube video on eLearning, but much of what Cathy says is applicable to all training)