



The *Um Ali* Training Syndrome

An article by Amr Farag

The Um Ali Training Syndrome: When Dessert Is More Impactful Than Development

Let's start with a hard truth.

In too many corporate training programs, especially the high-budget, hotel-hosted, buffet-filled spectacles, there's one consistent takeaway that lingers with participants long after the flip charts are folded and the PowerPoints have faded.

It's not the models. Not the methods. Not even the facilitators.

It's the **Um Ali**.

Yes, the Middle Eastern dessert that melts in your mouth — soft, sweet, rich, and utterly unforgettable. Sadly, the same cannot be said for the training content.

Welcome to the “Um Ali Training Syndrome.”

This is the epidemic sweeping through corporate L&D budgets across the globe: **Lavish sessions with zero strategic impact**. Workshops that are all icing, no cake. Trainings remembered not for insight, but for indulgence.

Ask participants what they learned 30 days after a session?

🧠 *Crickets.*

🍰 *“The Um Ali was amazing, though.”*

The Shocking Cost of Sweet Distractions

📊 According to **Harvard Business Review**, U.S. companies spend **over \$160 billion** annually on employee learning.

And yet...

📉 Only **10% of training is deemed effective** — with measurable impact on job performance.

📉 **75% of managers** are dissatisfied with their L&D function, according to **McKinsey**.

📉 A LinkedIn Learning report found that **94% of employees** would stay longer at a company if it invested in their development — but **only 8%** of CEOs track L&D impact as a key metric.

So what are we actually paying for? High-thread-count conference rooms? Fancy certificates? Or more Um Ali?

The Real Problem: Training That Tastes Good but Delivers Nothing

Here’s what traditional corporate training gets wrong:

- ❌ **It’s disconnected** from real work problems
- ❌ **It treats everyone the same** — regardless of role, skill level, or context
- ❌ **It lacks accountability** — no follow-up, no performance tracking, no coaching
- ❌ **It focuses on knowledge**, not actual **capability improvement**

This is what I call “**just-in-case learning**” — training delivered in case it might be useful someday... maybe... somehow.

Meanwhile, businesses are burning time, budgets, and energy with **no impact on KPIs**. And the workforce? Still stuck. Still disengaged. Still ordering more dessert.

What’s the Alternative? Human Performance Improvement (HPI)

The solution isn’t more training. It’s **better training** — driven by business results, not buffet ratings.

Enter: **Human Performance Improvement (HPI)**

💡 HPI is a results-based, systemic approach that:

- ✅ Diagnoses root causes of underperformance
- ✅ Designs interventions that go **beyond training** (like job redesign, feedback loops, or tech integration)
- ✅ Aligns learning with **actual business goals**
- ✅ Measures success by **performance outcomes**, not attendance sheets

Drucker Had It Right

“There is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which should not be done at all.”
— **Peter Drucker**

And yet, countless companies are proudly delivering irrelevant training... just more efficiently. If we applied the same logic to product development or customer service, we'd be out of business by next quarter.

A Wake-Up Call for HR and L&D Leaders

Before you plan your next training session, ask yourself:

- Are we solving a real performance issue?
- Will this session change behavior, or just fill seats?
- Do we have a way to **track impact** — not just attendance?
- Are we investing in **performance**, or **presentation**?
- Are we feeding minds... or just serving more Um Ali?

Final Bite: The ROI Is in Relevance

If your people walk away talking about the **food** more than the **framework**, you've failed. Training shouldn't be a perk. It should be a performance engine.

The future of work demands **precision learning**, **personalized development**, and **measurable outcomes**.

Let's stop serving sweetness and start delivering substance.

Because at the end of the day, it's not about what was on the table—it's about what got taken back to work.

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