CURRICULUM DESIGN CASE STUDY

Imprint Educators: Teaching Directors to Teach

Ben Couch

Role	Designer and instructor
Audience	Every department head and executive director across Watermark’s portfolio
Format	90-minute certification course, in the classroom or live online, with required follow-up coaching; now the two-hour Imprint Educators workshop
Materials	An instructor guide template used for every course, the certification course guide, a transfer-of-training reference, Learning Center modules for qualified instructors and coaching, and the workshop deck

The problem

At Watermark Retirement Communities, training had to happen in more than 80 communities across 23 states. A national training team can't teach every course in every building, so the teaching had to come from community leaders whose real job was running a department. Left to themselves, most people teach the way they were taught: explain the material, check the box, and move on. People leave informed, then do what they've always done.

What I built

I built a certification course that made every department head and executive director in the company a Watermark Certified Instructor, and I built the system around it so their teaching held up without me in the room. Every course used one instructor guide template, the Learning Center recognized only qualified instructors, and coaching after training was required and logged. I've since rebuilt the course as Imprint Educators, a two-hour workshop I deliver independently.

Design decisions

A definition anyone can test. The course opens by asking each instructor what effective training means, then gives them the standard they'll be held to: if nothing is different after we train, we haven't trained. Every later decision follows from that sentence.

One template for every course. Every instructor guide follows the same structure: purpose, a hook, steps with an active-participation drill about every five minutes, a demonstration of the skill, and a coaching plan. Any certified instructor could pick up any guide and teach it well, and still bring their own stories to it.

Practice on a real problem. In class, instructors choose a training problem they're struggling with in their own community and build a plan to retrain it through all four stages: explanation, modeling, practice, and coaching. The group checks the plan against the model, and the instructor leaves with it ready to use.

Coaching is required, not optional. Certification ends with required follow-up coaching and a session on logging coaching in the Learning Center. That made the follow-through visible, which is where most of the change actually happens.

Quality control built into the system. In the Learning Center, only a qualified instructor can mark an instructor-led course complete, and executive directors and HR directors manage who holds that designation. The standard lives in the platform, not in a memo.

Results

Over the years I taught this course to hundreds of department heads and executive directors. Imprint Educators keeps the same method and adds measurement: trainers learn to check results at 30, 60, and 90 days through skill demonstrations, retention checks, and feedback from participants, their managers, and their peers.

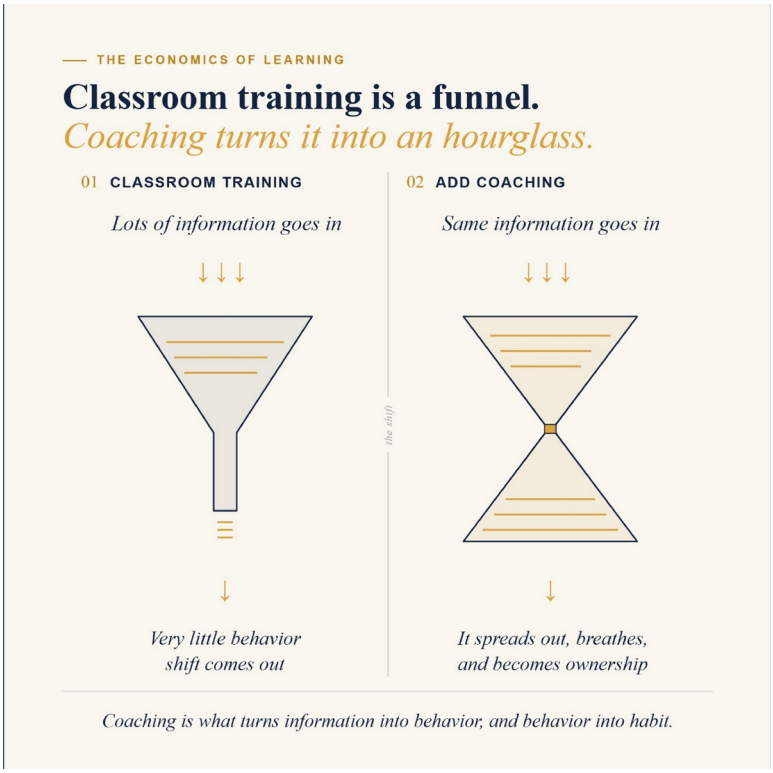
EXCERPTS

One standard, set in the first ten minutes

The workshop opens by asking trainers what effective training means, then gives them the standard they'll be held to. Every later slide is a tactic for meeting it.



Workshop slide. The test is behavior change, and the slide names the things that often pass for training without producing it.

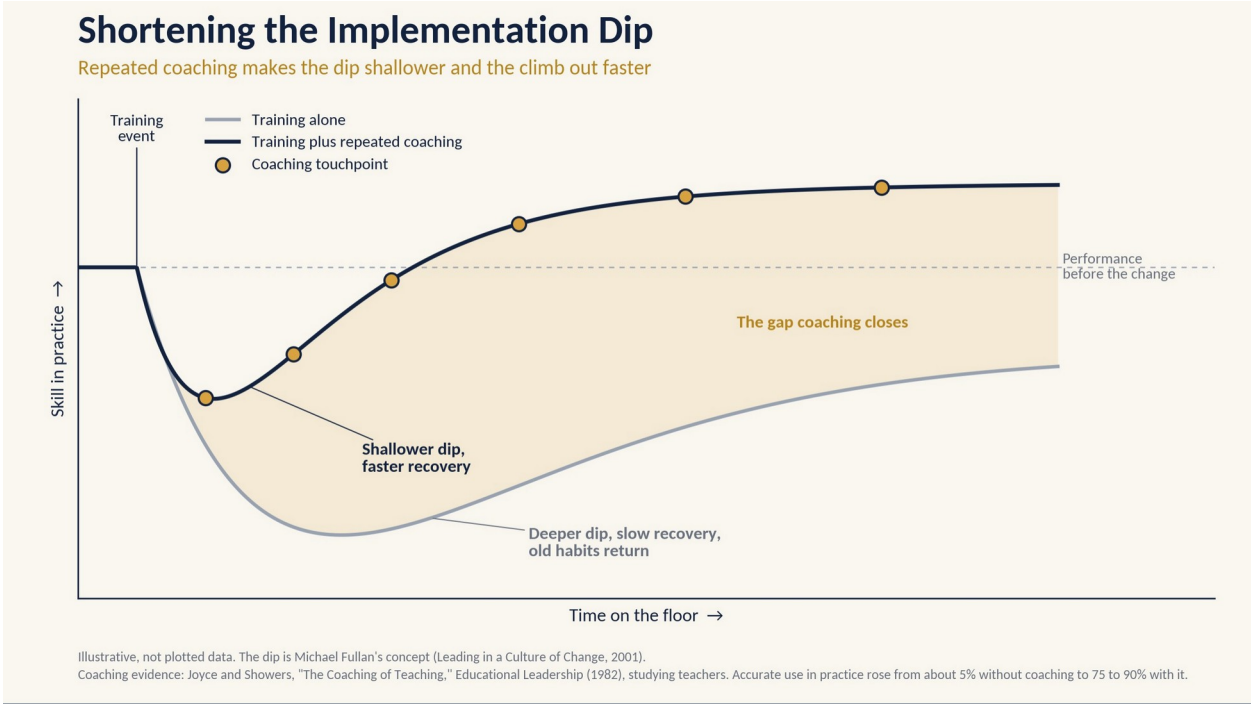


Workshop slide. Classroom training narrows to very little change; coaching after the session is what turns the same information into practice.

EXCERPTS

Preparing trainers for the dip

New trainers often quit coaching right when it matters most, because performance gets worse before it gets better. This slide shows them what to expect, so the dip reads as part of the process instead of a sign that the training failed.



Workshop slide. Illustrative, not plotted data. The dip is Michael Fullan's concept; the coaching evidence is from Joyce and Showers, as cited on the slide.

The setting was senior living, but the approach works anywhere managers have to teach: give them one clear standard, one format to build in, and a coaching requirement that someone has to log.