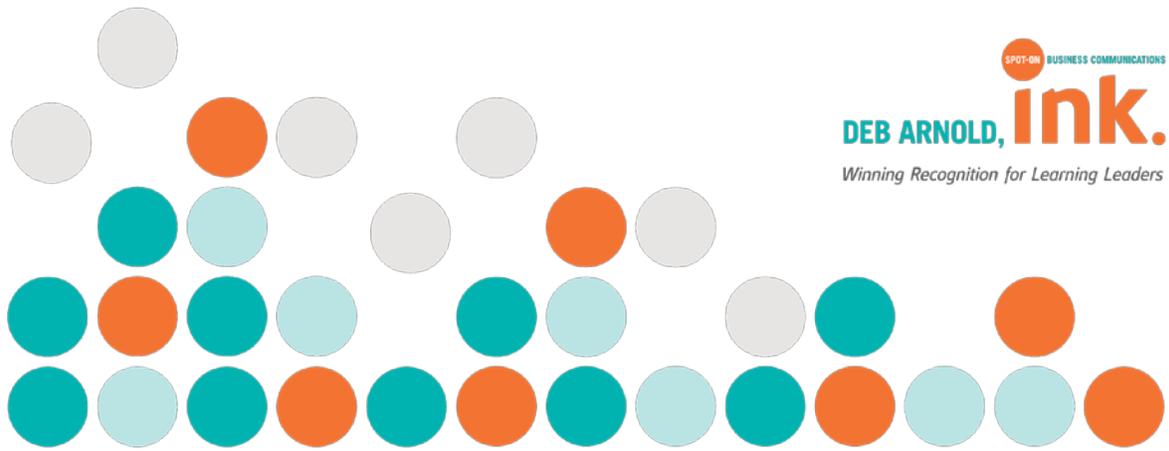# THE SMART APPLICANT'S
SURVIVAL GUIDE
TO THE 2018 TRAINING TOP 125

Useful resources, common sense advice and a few surprises about the learning industry's longest award application.

SPOT-ON BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS

DEB ARNOLD, ink.

Winning Recognition for Learning Leaders

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*Deb Arnold, Ink. is not affiliated with
Training magazine or the Training Top 125 Award.*

Training Top 125: An Overview

It's no secret that this award focuses on how the learning function supports corporate strategy and goals. However, having worked on this award since 2008, I have observed that each year the application is more explicit about this very focus. Increasingly, *Training* magazine has required evidence of this support, in more ways and in more sections. This leads me to believe that applicants were not, of their own volition, supplying this critical information.

How can this be?
Learning professionals are so close to what they do that it's often difficult to take a step back and really evaluate overall impact. Smile sheets, test scores and certifications are important, but they don't indicate business impact on the enterprise: revenue, employee engagement, customer satisfaction, productivity and so forth.

Measuring impact can be a challenge. The companies that rank high on this award meet that challenge. It's my belief that applying for this award (and others) challenges you, the learning leader, to aim higher, raise your standards, adjust your metrics, capture new data and expand your reach. Your ranking on this list, if disappointing, may guide you on where you need to adjust and focus.

Why I wrote this Guide for you
To do well on this award, you can't just be great. You have to prove on your application that you're great. I developed this Guide because I have seen many training professionals who are outstanding at what they do but who lack the time, resources and/or understanding of what's required to develop an outstanding submission. They do superlative work, but they are not getting credit for it because their award submissions don't reflect their true impact.

I hope that this Guide will help you show your learning organization in the best possible light. You deserve to be recognized for your hard work and accomplishments. And with everything else you have on your plate, you deserve some guidance that will save you time and stress.

The bottom line
The Training Top 125 judges want to know that training matters at your company and that you are having a positive impact on your organization—not just that you have successful programs, but that the learning function is systematically improving performance, driving results and supporting corporate strategic goals. Always bear this in mind, both in this application and as you strive to make a difference.

The 9 Biggest T125 Myths

These are actual misconceptions I have had to clear up with clients while working on the Training Top 125 (and some other awards). Okay, I may be paraphrasing rather than quoting them, but you'll get the idea. As I did for them, I want to save you time, worry and stress by debunking these myths.

1. How this award is scored is a total mystery so I shouldn't worry about it.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Unlike most other learning awards, the Top 125 folks tell you exactly how they score the award, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Pay close attention.

For most *quantitative* questions, like the one about your company's tuition reimbursement maximum, your score will be what it will be and you can't to do much to change it. Still, to do your best on this award you MUST closely examine each question and make sure you are answering correctly and fairly and giving credit where credit is due (I point this out because some L&D folks I've known have tended to judge their own merits harshly or just unfairly).

Your 30 *qualitative* points truly depend on your following the guidelines. When I review submissions from the previous year and go over the scores, I very often find that if applicants didn't do well in a particular section it's because they simply failed to pay attention to what's required to earn the maximum points.

So whatever you do, PLEASE, follow the instructions and make wise use of the scoring guidelines.

2. Data must be precise or I will be struck down by lightning.

I have worked with clients who've sweated over every last number because they are conscientious and/or data-oriented. It's really not necessary. And that's not heretical advice.

I don't mean that you should be sloppy or make things up (heaven forbid!). I mean you shouldn't drive yourself or your colleagues bananas about whether you provided 578 or 579 online courses. The process is not meant to be a wild goose chase for data, nor will your application be fact-checked. It's true that most of the scoring is quantitative, so of course you want to be as accurate as possible. But like so many things in life, you have to pick your battles and where you want to expend energy and goodwill.

What's important is that your numbers reflect a relatively accurate picture of reality at your company, so just be as accurate as is reasonably possible. If the numbers basically feel right, they probably are.