

What You Should Know About Training Excellence

One of the great attributes of most effective front-line leaders is their insatiable appetite to learn. They consistently read business books and magazines, and attend seminars and company-sponsored learning events, continually looking for just one or two great ideas to apply at work and more importantly, at home. Their eagerness to learn is only surpassed by their thrill to apply it. This column focuses on how you can effectively train your team. Effective front-line leaders constantly provide learning opportunities for their employees, yet they understand that training is not always the answer. More specifically, they know that training is only appropriate if an employee needs a specific skill or knowledge set that he does not currently possess to successfully fulfill his job.

In all other cases, training is not the answer!

What follows are three steps that must be taken for excellent training:

Step 1: Assess the Need

The first step for excellent training is to assess the need for training. Remember, you have already assumed that there is a



A good seminar helps an employee become more than just a face in the crowd.

real training need and that training is the best intervention for improvement. Here is how you can conduct a quick training needs assessment.

Clarify the desired result. Determine the specific outcomes or performance levels you expect on the work to be performed.

Only assess the work—not the employee (that comes later). To help clarify the desired result, ask yourself such questions as:

What specifically needs to be done?

What are the steps, actions or thinking necessary for success?

What does successful performance look like?

How would I know the right result when I see it?

How would my employees know the right result when they see it?

Most important, what are the specific skill and knowledge sets necessary to successfully complete the task?

Only through a careful assessment of what specifically needs to be done to successfully complete the job or task can you create an effective training environ-

ment. When you feel you have a clear, concise picture of the desired result, you are now ready to move on to the next part—the SKA assessment.

Assess the employee's skill, knowledge, and attitude (SKA). Assessing an employee's SKA is not as difficult as it may sound. All you need to do is answer the following three questions: Do they know how to do it (Skill)? Do they know what to do (Knowledge)? Do they want to do it (Attitude)?

If an employee does not know how to do it, they need hands-on training. If they don't know what to do, they need information. But if they don't want to do it, it may not be a training issue but a motivation issue.

Here is an example. A nurse intern may have both the skill and knowledge to lift and turn a patient in bed, but may not want to do it (motivation issue). Or he may want to do it (attitude) and possess the physical ability to do it (skill) but may not know how best to lift the patient without harming them (knowledge).

Close the Gap. To close the gap, compare the desired result to the current SKA. The difference is the gap that needs to be filled for acceptable performance. If the gap is minimal, perhaps a quick one-on-one review with the employee may be all that is necessary. However, if the skill or knowledge gap is quite substantial, a more significant training intervention may be necessary.

Step 2: Choose the Training Option

Choosing the best training option for your employees is as much an art as a science. No one method or type of training will work for every employee in every situation. Different people learn in different ways.

The key to effective training is to be very flexible in how you train your employees, allowing for as much individualized



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learning approaches as you can. Do not assume that everyone learns the same way as you. Vary the methods to meet the employee's individual styles.

For this reason, I have listed 15 different options for excellent training. You need not use all 15, but I want to encourage you to use as many as you can, aligning the employee's preferred learning style with an appropriate training option.

Self-paced learning: Allow the employee to learn at their own pace and not be forced to keep up with or be slowed down by other learners.

Cross-training: Expand skills and knowledge by learning new job functions and roles in other departments or areas.

Small group interaction/learning: Create small teams of learners to encourage and assist each other in gaining stronger SKA; very effective if you have a strong team leader or employee who loves to train others naturally.

Reading (books, manuals): Create a shared library or monthly reading list.

Computer-based training (CBT): Offer employees time at work and at home to experiment and play with new learning applications.

Seminars: Send employees to internal or external seminars.

Job sharing: Allow employees to share jobs across departments; an extension of cross training.

Job shadowing: Encourage employees to observe others for a half-day, full-day or longer periods of time.

Coaching: Provide one-on-one or team coaching for performance improvement; hire an outside coach when needed.

Video learning: At home or on the job.

Audio learning: At home or on the job.

Interviewing: Schedule interviews with employees who already perform the job well.

Job switch: Temporarily or permanently allow employees to switch job functions.

Mentoring: Develop an internal mentoring program.

Hands-on Training/Simulations: Use real-time, on-the-job training opportunities.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of training options, but I hope that this list has motivated you to consider more than a "one size fits all" approach to choosing the right training option.

Step 3: Measure the Results

What gets measured gets done. If you do not measure the effectiveness of the training, it is likely that your employees will not consistently integrate the learning, will drop the new learning when mistakes are made, and will resist future training interventions because no one notices the difference.

Monitor their performance along the Quality, Quantity, Time and Cost (QQTC) necessary for the job or the task within that job. Quickly reinforce their improvement and congratulate them on their successes.

Be sure to reinforce their training by asking them how they have applied their new skill or knowledge base. Allow them to share their new knowledge with others to better reinforce the learning and to encourage others to also be open to appropriate training interventions.

If after training and monitoring performance your employee is no closer to achieving the desired results, schedule a meeting with them and ask:

Did this training give you the SKA you need to meet the desired result?

If not, what did we miss?

If we missed something, how can we get you the right SKA?

Has the task changed since the training?

What frustrations are you encountering?

Do we need to re-train via another method?

Training excellence begins with understanding those things that masquerade as training issues. The three steps are to assess the need, choose the training option and measure the results of the training.