

Hey, Let's Do Some Training
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Training Based on Business Results, Not Broadway

In the Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney movies of the 1930's a bunch of kids in need of money for some noble cause would ponder their fundraising options, and then either Judy or Mickey would yell out "Hey, let's do a show!" Suddenly all the energies and meager resources of the group would come together in a magical synergy to create something just this side of Broadway. The show was a success, the noble cause was served, and Judy and Mickey would look into the camera beaming from ear to ear just before the words "The End" came up on the screen.

The Quick Fix

There are problems in an organization and people just don't know what to do to make it better, and then some manager named Judy or Mickey says "Hey, let's do some training!" Even better is the phrase "Hey, I just got a brochure on a training program from (fill in the blank with the name of the company), and it's just what we need." Everyone gets all excited and knows this will be the solution to everything. If only life imitated art.

Unfortunately this is the approach a lot of people and organizations take regarding training; it's a show, a feel good event that will surely produce a happy ending. When it doesn't, it is the fault of the training program or its sponsor, and the credibility of the training (or the process of training itself) and those who deliver it is eroded. It's also the reason training is historically one of the first things cut when times get bad.

Listen to the Business

The president of a company I worked for had a great phrase, "If you listen to the business, the business will make your decisions for you". Conducting an analysis of the problems or the organizational needs is the first step of the process. In other words, listen to the business. The important thing is that there is a business reason for taking action, and there are certain business results that are expected. Start with the results you want to achieve, and not with the assumed solution. It is also important to realize that training may not necessarily be the right solution, or may only be a part of it. Don't get hung up on the fact that training will be the ultimate recommendation of the analysis; keep an open mind with all options in play.

The Dirty Harry School of Management

One of the first things with any analysis (whether the problem is with an individual or a group) is to apply what I call the Dirty Harry School of Management. If Dirty Harry pointed his .44 magnum at you (or your organization) and said “Go ahead! Make my day”, could you do what’s needed? If the answer is that what is needed can’t be done even if your life depended on it, then there is a skill deficiency and training may be a part of the solution. If the answer is yes, it can be done if your life depends on it, then the problem is performance or systemic. In that case why spend the time and money to train someone in something they already know how to do. It’s the definition of insanity -- doing the same thing over and over and expecting to get a different result.

Analyze This

Some of the things the analysis should determine are:

- if the required resources are available to do the job properly
- if expectations have been properly defined and communicated, or
- if the work itself can be modified or simplified.

Remember, we’re conducting an analysis, and not trying to make a case for training. For a much more in depth review of these and other factors I recommend reading Robert Mager and Peter Pipe’s book *Analyzing Performance Problems* (www.cepworldwide.com).

The analysis helps define the business reason for any training initiative. It is important to remember that the funding of any initiative (individual or comprehensive program) comes from the same corporate checkbook that others want to tap for things like computers, software, equipment, etc. The organization needs to understand the ROI. If it can’t be defined, then the training is just a show, and other areas will get the funding and support. The closer any training is aligned with an organization’s business and strategic needs, the more it adds value and becomes an integrated part of the business strategy.

Training as a Competitive Advantage

Some things to consider in building the business case for training are:

- how it keeps the organization competitive
- how it affects the customer
- how it affects performance and efficiencies, and
- how it helps in attracting and retaining the talent needed for success.

When looking at the concept of Total Rewards, the ability of the organization’s talent to develop their personal and professional skills and competencies is one of the fundamental areas affecting retention and engagement. This investment in people can be marketed to help attract the talent. In short, training (if done for the

right reasons) is a competitive advantage that helps the organization win the talent war. Those organizations that win the talent war are successful; those that don't are playing catch up ball.

A Systems Approach to Training

There is a tendency to look at training as an independent activity. This approach will doom any training initiative to failure; a systems approach is required to sustain the desired outcomes and benefits of the training. First of all the people with the checkbook need to understand and support any training initiative, they need to know what the training will do and not do. They need (along with everyone else involved with the initiative) to be able to understand and measure the ROI. Expectations must be communicated clearly to both those who will participate, and to those who will manage the participants (The managers themselves may need training to do this – but that's another needs analysis). Employee communications, performance management, and rewards and recognition are some of the key systems that needs to be aligned with any training initiative. Sustaining the initiative and getting the desired results are essential for success and setting the stage for the next initiative.

Conducting a training program is not the end point; it is part a continuous cycle of organizational growth and development.

Training initiatives that are aligned with an organization's strategy and produce the desired results are simply good business. Those that aren't aligned are just a show.