

Milwaukee, WI

HOW TO SELECT A CORPORATE TRAINING PROGRAM

Habits, good and bad, are hard to break. They can't be changed at the snap of a finger, or the crack of a corporate training manual. Especially a manual in a program designed to encompass all businesses with employees of all experience levels.

This is a common mistake made when employers seek out training to improve staff, said Christine McMahon of McMahon & Associates, Milwaukee, which implements custom-designed training programs for business.

There are three very important things to remember when selecting a corporate training program, she said.

First, capture the knowledge that already exists, and use it. Pair up the more experienced employees with those who have not been around quite as long. A little mentoring can go a long way.

"When you learn from people in your own peer group, your mind is more open to new ideas," McMahon said.

Realizing the current knowledge base can also enable a trainer to get people involved.

GET LEARNERS INVOLVED

Second, be certain that the person conducting the training uses hands-on experiments. Getting up and actively participating assists in the learning process.

And third and most important, follow up on the training. If the trainer isn't involved with follow-up and neither are supervisors, the experience becomes mundane.

"Employees will tend to think, 'OK, this year, this is what we're learning,'" McMahon said. "Instead of incorporating what they've learned, they'll forget about it and go back to a daily routine."

Following up means that trainers and

employers should check to assure the training is working and being used. Facilitators should send out surveys asking how the new methods are working. After giving the participants a time to adjust and incorporate the new information, supervisors should ask questions. Is it working? Is it not working? Why? If using the methods created a positive experience, which ones worked? If it was negative, ask what can be done to make the procedures effective.

→ Ken Sergi, manager of worldwide organization and development for Case Corp. in Racine, said it's important to know your company's goals when selecting a vendor to facilitate training.

"What's the company's long-term strategy? You must look at the needs of the company, not the individual," he said.

STICK TO THE MISSION

After assessing goals and needs, then use that as criteria for deciding on the vendor, and on the content of the training. There must be a link between the education of employees and the mission of the company.

Also look at the delivery of the training. Is it in lecture format or does it require active participation? The content will determine which is better, Sergi said.

"But if you don't know what you need, the more simulation there is, the better off employees will be. And the more cognitive thinking, the better off they will be, too," he said.

McMahon stressed the importance of custom-designed training.

"Training has to be individualized for companies to be successful. People listen more intently when you're speaking their language," she said. "Every company has a different language."

Companies conducting training should find out what experience levels are at a company, as well as performance levels and obviously, type of business. A seminar could be demonstrating the same sales techniques to a roomful of people that includes 25-year veteran salespeople, and people who have never sold a day in their life, but intend to start.

Be certain the training is set up so that everyone is involved. That veteran salesperson already knows basic selling techniques and will get bored and irritated learning them over again. A new person to the field will feel overwhelmed and will lose interest.

"Training should be dynamic, interactive and professional," McMahon said. "The lecture format is from bygone days. Most people now want to be entertained."

Challenge the trainer to answer the following questions: What's in the training for me, as a buyer? What can I expect? And most important, is it relevant to my business needs?

McMahon said that following up on the training will yield the best results, and get the most for your money.

"If you're investing \$6,000 in a training program, you want to know what kind of results you're going to get," she said.

- Carlise Newman

Education

