

When Managers Do the Training

Putting training into the hands of line managers is an idea that many advocate and few companies practice successfully. Lechmere Inc., is one of the few. In this interview, Lechmere's senior vice president for personnel with responsibility for training, Paul Chaddock, tells how and why Lechmere took this innovative road to productivity improvement and what skills a trainer needs to travel on it.

TDJ *What set the stage at Lechmere for the decision to have line managers implement the company's training programs?*

PC Four years ago, Lechmere's parent company, Dayton-Hudson, appointed a new CEO. That was George Scala and he recruited a new management team from other parts of Dayton-Hudson. He looked for people who shared a common management philosophy and who had a commitment to strategic planning. The new management philosophy consisted of two important principles: the company would make a strong commitment to the customer; and the merchandising function would be the engine that pulled the whole company. Every other function, including training, would support merchandising in meeting the covenant with the customer.

I was hired as vice president for personnel and asked to help assemble the management team. We spent a long time on our mission and on creating a philosophy for the role of the personnel function, which is where training and development originate at Lechmere. We decided that its role was to help the merchandising arm of the company be successful at achieving the company's goals.

Putting training in the hands of line managers has always been my personal philosophy. It stems from my basic perception of the role of the manager as one who has a charter with his or her subordinates to improve their competence. It's part of a manager's responsibility just like

meeting a deadline or working within a budget.

TDJ *What role does that leave for the training function?*

PC I believe that the human resource function should be client-centered. The true role of training is to solve performance deficiencies. It is not to develop people, or to maximize career options. It is to help people acquire skill for performing their jobs.

You can make an analogy to other functions in a company. The role of the legal function is to make sure decisions are made legally, not to make decisions itself. It's the role of financial specialists to provide data for sound fiscal decisions. It's not their role to make those decisions.

Every function, including training, supports merchandising in meeting the covenant with the customer.

It's the function of the training department to provide tools to the managers who will provide the training. By tools I mean such things as design skills and some knowledge of training delivery and adult learning.

The first tool we give managers at Lechmere is an understanding that lack of knowledge and productivity are related. We show line managers how to link competence and results. Then we give them training programs, counsel and advice, feedback systems and job aids.

TDJ *What effect does a role like that have on people in the training department?*

PC Not all trainers would buy the role that I espouse. Traditional trainers would come from an environment with a different system of consequences. Here they don't have the opportunity to be a showperson—a presenter—very often. There are fewer sources of accolades because the accolades for conducting the training program go to the line manager. At Lechmere, a trainer must be willing to give up expert power. He or she must see that training skills are being applied all over the company. This is a major adjustment for many trainers.

Here a trainer must know design, feedback systems and problem solving. I lead specific skill-building sessions for trainers after asking them to define and prioritize their own training needs. They must have project management skills to handle the consulting relationship they are going to have with other parts of the company. They must learn how to say no to clients and how to promise only what they can deliver. They must learn to live with situations in which they don't have control of the actual training. They must develop and understand their budgetary responsibilities. They must know how to prescribe and facilitate remedies and how to tell a client when his idea won't solve the problem at hand. They have to get the client to stop saying "I need green pills" and start saying "This is where I hurt."

TDJ *What is the value to a company of training structured this way?*

PC The value to the company is that it has more competent line managers who

Paul Chaddock was interviewed for this article by Patricia Galagan, editor of the Training & Development Journal.

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to top management training. The subject matter is a variable. Training is the process that enables others to teach it.

TDJ *What things might a trainer have to do differently?*

PC You may have to change the expectation of your company, your boss or your CEO. You may think, for example, that a time management course would solve problems for the sales force better than the sales training their boss has proposed. When you differ about the solution to a problem, you must propose a solution of value to the person whose expectations you are trying to change. Remember that you will be fighting expectations and past experiences with in and for training.

Training jargon can put people off or make them feel dumb. It's often more productive to ask a person to describe what a problem will look like when its solved than to force them through a formal problem definition process. What decisions do they want to make? What will be happening when the problem is gone? Then look for a solution that will accomplish these goals.

TDJ *How successful has your approach been at Lechmere?*

PC We have created a lot of training in a very short time. Every employee has been through a value's program, called "Lechmere Is. . ." I judge our success in part by the fact that I hear those values being talked about, including our principles about managers being responsible for developing subordinates.

I'm no longer challenged about the number of bodies in the training department. The executive committee, our top management group, told us they think we need *more* bodies because they see the value in what the training department does.

We've created a market in the company for training. We identified areas where training would provide the experience and skills needed for expansion—one of the company's important goals. We asked, when we open a new branch store, what will those new people need to do? What will happen? We brought out needs and when we had them identified, personnel was asked to specify the resources—the human resources—the company would need.

TDJ *Would you describe how training is delivered at Lechmere? Where do the line managers come in?*

Lechmere Inc. based in Woburn, Massachusetts, is part of the Dayton-Hudson Corporation, a national retail conglomerate. Lechmere has 10 stores and plans to open 13 more in 1986 and 1987 in Boston and other cities. The training department has four professional positions and is part of a team comprising executive recruiting, management development, compensation, benefits, personnel relations, and executive planning and placement.

PC To prepare for the opening of Lechmere's new stores, we put together training teams. Each team includes a trainer who counsels the team and teaches training skills such as design and task analysis. Each team also includes a manager who uses the skills the trainer has taught him, develops the training, and delivers it.

The team includes a master performer who describes the task involved in a particular process. If cashiering were the skill to be taught, a master cashier from an existing store would help develop performance standards.

The managers develop their own leader's guides and training materials. They use different training methodologies, but when a manager wants to know the best way to teach something, the trainer is there as a resource. Finally, the managers learn how to train other people as trainers.

When this process is finished, we have done a task analysis, developed a leader's guide, and started a train-the-trainer program. We can deliver more programs using less training staff time because trainers can consult and counsel several teams at once.

Even though the line managers are doing the training, the training department has responsibility for its success. We must make sure that training is delivered at the appropriate level in the organization. We don't advocate functional purity or box people into functions. We want them to work together for company goals—more like a beach than a bunch of sandboxes.

We're still at the beginning of our efforts to put training into the hands of line managers. We're still giving them basic skills. Later we expect to work with them on areas such as understanding how training can positively impact market share, turnover, and productivity, but while Lechmere is growing fast, we're working to get our basic training charter accepted by the organization.

We try to assess what we learn as we go along. We brief ourselves on different ways to accomplish our goals. We review solutions to problems because solutions can become less relevant over time. We ask ourselves constantly if particular training solutions are still working, still needed.