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Voice Mail

Put Training Where It Belongs

Many trainers have to make considerable efforts to market training in their own organizations. One reason is that the training function usually is in the wrong part of the organizational structure.

In each organization, the training function needs to be in the part around which all other organizational activities revolve—whether that part is operations, sales, production, or marketing. It's time that we put training at the hub.

Traditionally, training lies within the realm of human resource management. It seems logical to let the people who hire, process, and orient new employees also train them before turning them over to their supervisors. The supervisors might or might not conduct further training, depending on what they feel is necessary or comfortable.

Once supervisors get their hands on new hires, it's hard to make the supervisors let go of employees long enough for them to receive training. Production demands, quotas, goals, crises, and anything else supervisors think is important tend to outweigh training requirements that don't come from higher levels in the supervisors' own departments.

If a department head doesn't consider training to be important enough to allocate time and other resources to it, trainers' marketing efforts can have little effect. The only ways to influence department heads to make training a priority are to make training the responsibility of the department that serves as the hub of the organization and to move the training staff to that department to assist supervisors. Make training

the responsibility of supervisors (put it in their job descriptions) and use the training staff to provide training support to the supervisors.

If the hub department—whether it is operations, production, or marketing—“owns” the training function, training will become a priority. The human resource department no longer has to overcome the inertia of other departments. HRD can limit its involvement with training to new-employee orientation. Supervisors can oversee technical training, simulations, professional development, and training on new systems and methodologies—with help from the training staff.

Making supervisors responsible for training is worthwhile. Supervisors usually are an organization's subject matter experts; they tend to know what kind of training is needed, without having to conduct a formal needs assessment. They're usually in good positions to determine and allocate necessary resources for training. In addition, training supervisors to become trainers can remove the stigma of “interloper” associated with trainers, who are viewed by some people as either well-intentioned meddlers or necessary evils.

In cases in which people are inadequately trained and can't function at satisfactory or competitive levels, managers and even directors can conduct the necessary training. Also, when it is the hub department that identifies a weak area requiring a “training fix,” other managers will be more likely to support the training.

As I write this, I can hear the cries: “There is no reason to believe it could work.” “Most of our trainers come up through the HR system. How can they function in operations or marketing?” “It has never been done this way before.”

TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

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Voice Mail

The truth is that it has been done before. It is still the methodology that is used by at least one of the United States' major uniformed military services.

Generally, the most significant staff member in any military organization is the operations officer. In the United States Army, the operations officer is the person who oversees the planning, resourcing, conducting, and evaluation of training. Only the commander (similar to a CEO)—and occasionally the chief of staff—can significantly influence the operations officer's assessment of what, when, and how to train.

Does that work? Just look at the remarkable military success of Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Even though Iraqi forces were poorly led and poorly equipped, the level of success shown by U.S. forces never could have been achieved without demanding, realistic, well-designed, and well-executed training.

Don't worry about trainers born and bred in HRD not fitting into other organizational departments. The military thrives on giving people the specific skills they need for specific missions. That works very well indeed. There is no reason to think the same approach can't work in civilian organizations.

Additional benefits, seldom seen in civilian organizations, of the military approach are a high level of crosstraining and a broader perspective on the mission. Those benefits enhance both the accomplishment of the mission and the individual development of the staff. Trainers who are closer to the skills being used and the functions in which people are being trained have a better understanding of how the training they provide fits into an organization's culture.

I am a trainer. Don't hide me in the organization's human resource department just because we call training "human resource development." Put me close to the real hub of an organization. Put me in operations, production, or whatever department is the big fish in the organization's pond.

— **Phillip J. Santucci**
Arizona Family Care Associates
Santa Vista, California

Learning From Each Other

Downsizing, team building, empowerment, nonmanaging managers, and diversity—all of those trends lead to a new organizational structure stretched laterally into a "flat" organization.

No longer does information come from above, majestically doled out from Management with a capital "M." Instead, we build teams and are guided by kindly muses who inspire rather than dictate. We're also guided by a clear, shared understanding of our own organization's vision.

According to *Fortune* (May 17, 1993), the business world is changing fundamentally. The cover article presents six trends that will shape the workplace; four of them refer to a restructuring of the traditional organizational hierarchy into a "spider web," a network of specialists and technicians.

Already, most American businesses employ fewer than 100 people. The fastest-growing business segment in the United States is made up of entrepreneurs. Home offices are springing up everywhere. "Freelance" and "consulting" no longer mean "unemployed." In effect, we in the United States have become individual members of an enormous corporation: the American business world.

With fewer monolithic companies to serve as models, it is fast becoming necessary to learn from each other—a kind of "interactive learning" or "constant learning," one of the six *Fortune* trends. Interactive learning is the process by which we glean information, lessons, and skills from one another. Instead of looking above for direction, we will be learning more from the men and women at our global shoulders.

Flat organizational structures do have drawbacks. Knowledge is not handed to us; we have to ferret it out. And we have to make up the rules. There are no obvious leaders. In fact, it is a disquieting thought to some people that we may be the leaders. The truth is that we are all leaders. And without clear paradigms, interactive learning is the only way we're going to succeed.

Interactive learning is self-perpetuating; it lacks the guidance that comes from trainers and managers.

Similar to a solar panel, interactive learning makes use of the elements, which never dissipate. We are the elements that make up the whole.

Interactive learning is the technological wave of the future. Already there are computerized programs in which we are participants, not just viewers. As we interact directly with the computer screen, our input becomes part of the whole. We create as well as participate.

As a public speaker, I find that I learn from my audiences—so much so that I have recently begun designing a new program that throws the presentation back into the audiences' laps. Through their own choices, participants will guide the program to an outcome they've helped create.

There is no better way to give people what they want than to ask them to help us give it to them. Participants' input, which comes from new perspectives, can help us as presenters and trainers think about issues we haven't before verbalized. Even in standard question-and-answer peri-

ods, we trainers should take notes.

Such interaction engenders respect and self-confidence, which are prerequisites to creativity. Interaction establishes feelings of mutual support; participants feel comfortable taking risks, offering ideas, and abandoning tired and safe theories. But the most brilliant advantage of interactive learning is the wealth of knowledge it offers, with which we can play.

Whether we feel comfortable viewing ourselves as leaders in flat organizations is no longer the issue. As members of any organization, we are part of a new paradigm of leadership. Today's leaders must take responsibility for interactive learning. Each of us is the model.

Interactive learning demands open, honest communication. We have to listen carefully and speak truthfully. We must resist punishing failure—our own failure and that of others. We need to take risks and encourage risk taking in others. We must always think win/win.

When we choose to embrace

interactive learning, we will truly become partners in leadership.

—James J. Mapes
Quantum Leap Thinking
Wilton, Connecticut

Clarification

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator instrument was referred to incorrectly in the article, "Are You the Write Type?" by Stephen D. Gladis (July 1993). MBTI is a trademark of Consulting Psychologists Press, in Palo Alto, California. As a trademark, its legal use is as an adjective rather than a noun; in other words, the article should have discussed the "MBTI instrument" rather than "the MBTI."

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