



**“I like to be in the field . . . I crawl around on the tops of buildings with learners.”**

Lori Schreiber has little in common with many of the workplace learning and performance professionals featured in this magazine: “The issues most practitioners deal with are so different from ours. They can assume a well-educated workforce, motivation for training among employees, and access to computers and technology.” Indeed, Schreiber’s early career in white-collar instructional design for such companies as Arthur Andersen and NETg did little to prepare her for her current role as vice president of employee development and learning services for EMCOR Facilities Services, a nationwide company with multiple subsidiaries, client sites, and 6,000 employees. Eighty percent of those employees are engaged in hands-on building maintenance.

Further, there was no history for learning, either within the new company, which was formed in 2000, or within the industry. “What was originally seen as no real need for training changed with high turnover and evolving customer expectations,” Schreiber says. “However, as training began to be seen as a potential source of competitive advantage, I discovered that there was no one to benchmark against.”

All was not smooth sailing internally: “Initially, there was a lot of resistance, especially to the spending. I spent a lot of time educating people.”

Despite the challenges, Schreiber has acquitted herself admirably. In the past four years, since the learning services division was created, she has developed and implemented a companywide strategic plan to deliver performance improvement solutions, which is supported by a new competency model program that guides the creation of individual development plans and aligns to business needs. Schreiber created the competency models herself, over the course of a year, with the help of subject matter experts. Beginning with more than 150 job descriptions, she narrowed those down to six key levels of mastery in each maintenance discipline. “I also did lots of site visits at first. I like to be in the field, talking with learners. I crawled around on the tops of buildings with them!” she laughs.

In 2004, Schreiber’s department won a Bronze award for Excellence in Learning from Brandon Hall. Now that the pieces are in place, Schreiber concentrates on attracting more learners, setting up a more robust and useful LMS, and continuing to push the envelope in designing e-learning that will be attractive to her particular audience.

“It’s very hard to get learning out to our employees,” she says. “Because they are dispersed throughout 600 facilities and client sites—sometimes only one or two people to a location—there is no central way to communicate with them. They don’t have desks or personal computers.

“They must come looking for the learning, so we must make it compelling.” **TD**

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