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Ways

It's a universal frustration: how to get management support for training. I hear about it frequently from instructors. Usually, the management level just above their trainees gives them the most trouble.

Here are some typical complaints from training professionals:

- ▶ "The people who need the training most aren't sent."
- ▶ "Management often asks us to shorten a course to less time than is needed to meet the objectives."
- ▶ "Sometimes, supervisors pull a participant out of the training for a crash project, and the participant rarely gets to return to class."
- ▶ "Managers don't follow up. They don't recognize or reinforce new behavior when their people return from training."
- ▶ "Some managers undermine our efforts by telling trainees, 'I don't

know what they taught you in class, but here's how I want things done.'"

Sound familiar? Such comments highlight the problem of winning senior managers' buy-in for training. Of course, there can be problems with the training itself involving the design and delivery, instructor's credibility, relevance of the content and goals, and timing. But even when you have your house in order on all of those elements, you may still face a lack of management support. Managers often view time spent in training as nonproductive, especially in a downsized organization in which employees are already stretched. In such cases, training is seen as a cost rather than an investment. And because many managers have had workshops on soft skills, they may view training as warm and fuzzy—nice to know, but not essential and perhaps a waste of time.

At last!—some specific actions for getting the support you need from senior managers for your training programs.

You'll also improve training transfer.

Go for it!

To Get Management Buy-In

Ten actions

There are several things you can do to get managers on board. They are based on two assumptions: One, responsibility for training can't be delegated; it must either be shared or abdicated. Two, the training and development of a manager's staff, team, or work group is too important to be left to people other than training professionals. An instructor can help a manager, but only if their partnership is recognized, formalized, and strengthened throughout a training program.

My definition of training includes behavior change—performance improvement back on the job. That's why training can't be delegated. Imparting information can be delegated, but training involves more than imparting information. If it doesn't, one can hardly blame managers for not supporting it.

Here are 10 actions for gaining management's support for training.

BY SCOTT B. PARRY

IN THIS ARTICLE

Securing Support for HRD

1 Start at the top

Link training to your company's business plan. Here are several ways to do that.

- ▶ Make sure each course is sponsored by a senior manager responsible for ensuring that it relates directly to company goals.
- ▶ Conduct a feasibility analysis before launching a new course and before estimating the size of the training audience over time, the number of cycles offered, and the cost and benefits. Express the benefits in dollars and tie them to the business plan.
- ▶ Have a training advisory committee of managers review each program to ensure its link to company goals.
- ▶ Check the purpose statement and course objectives of each program to make sure they describe workplace behavior (performance criteria) and not just the acquisition of knowledge.

2 Conduct a needs analysis

Involve participants' managers. Get them to articulate the desired training outcome. Use surveys, simulations, paper-and-pencil assessments, and records of present performance to get managers interested. Their input can make a course more relevant and increase their buy-in because they were asked to participate early on.

3 Report the results

Summarize the results of the needs analysis, and send out the proposed course objectives for managers to review. If you have conducted a feasibility analysis, you may also share those results showing how the dollar value of the potential benefits exceeds the cost.

4 Brief participants' managers

Conduct a one-hour briefing several weeks before launching a course. Prepare an agreement between trainees, their managers, and the instructor that outlines their individual responsibilities. Distribute the schedule of topics and meetings, and a checklist of what managers should do to follow up the training and reinforce new skills and behavior on the job. If possible, get a senior manager to co-host the briefing and send the invitations.

5 Bring the workplace into the workshop

Encourage participants to discuss problems and situations they face on the job. Participants and their managers should complete pre-course assessments and self-inventories prior to a course. Use critical incident reports to generate case studies and workshop exercises on key learning points. Divide the class into subgroups of three to four people so they have the opportunity to exchange work-related challenges and ways to handle them.

6 Have managers instruct

Invite some managers who have been actively supportive of the training to work with the instructor and provide team teaching. Different managers should teach different sessions. If possible, run the managers through the course first. You can also conduct a brief train-the-trainer session to explain and illustrate the managers' role as facilitator and to distinguish between your role and theirs.

7 Take the workshop back to the workplace

If you're teaching an entire job to new employees, provide them with a job description and give them time to make notes after you cover each major task or responsibility. They can take those items back to their supervisors to review together. When trainees are incumbent employees and you're teaching new concepts and skills so they can become more effective, have them prepare action plans that outline the new behavior they will use on the job. They should share their plans with their managers. You can also distribute job aids, checklists, and procedure guidelines for use back on the job.

8 Schedule Alumni Day

Bring participants together three to six weeks after they complete a course. Each should report for a few minutes on the cost and benefits of implementing their action plans to date. Invite their managers, whose agreement to the follow-up meeting should be obtained prior to training at the managers' briefing (number 4). Bestow certificates, and celebrate

with food and beverages. Because managers will want their staffs to report success with the action plans, they're more likely to support participants' new behavior in the workplace.

9 Write your success story

Collect data on participants' success using interviews, post-training questionnaires, and the Alumni Day reports. Obtain quotes from participants and managers. Publish the information in the company newsletter, a local newspaper, or industry publications. Send copies to senior managers, the participants' managers, and the training advisory committee. Include the cost-benefit data obtained from action plan reports or a cost-benefit analysis.

10 Conduct a cost-benefit analysis

Tally all of the expenses and benefits of a course, projected over the full payback period to prove that effective training doesn't cost; it pays. The return-on-investment can exceed the cost by an impressive ratio.

Last, think of one of your key training programs. Choose a course you are familiar with. Suppose you were to go into the workplace one month after delivering that course and observe every situation in which participants had to apply what they learned. What percentage do you think you'd see being applied correctly?

When I ask an audience of training professionals that question, most answer about 20 percent—whether they're in the United States, Singapore, Kuwait, or Mexico City. Yet, I suspect that actual data would produce a higher number.

It is now in your hands: 10 ideas for strengthening management's active support of training. You're probably using some of them already. Even if you use only three or four new ones, you can significantly increase their support and the transfer of training. ■

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