

Planning the Leadership Message

Before you deliver training, take on a leader mindset.

By John Baldoni

As a training professional, one of your responsibilities is to move people from one skill set to another. That's leadership. Your role within the organization is vital. By adopting the leadership mindset, you will learn to think and act like a leader to help achieve the professional goals of everyone involved.

First, plan

Leadership message planning is essential to the success of any training initiative. It's

the leader's job to point people in the right direction—with clear, coherent, and consistent communication designed and planned thoughtfully and in advance.

Leadership communications are those messages from leaders that are significant to key stakeholders. When training is involved, the messages are targeted to employees. These messages are significant because they're about big things: vision, mission, change, and urgency. The purpose of leadership communications is

two-fold: to build greater levels of trust and to drive results. Within those purposes, the messages can affirm culture and values—or state the case for training in order to implement a new process, reiterate a need for quality, or develop new skills.

Next, take action

The reasons for leadership messages are endless, but when planning a training effort consider these actions:

Clarify the purpose. The success of the plan depends on the clarity of the message. When creating the message, think about the outcome and what you want people to do. When you determine the main point of the message, work backwards to formulate it.

Link the message to the culture. The message must be consistent with the values of the people in the organization. When an automotive executive speaks to a group of franchise dealers, he underscores the need to create a rewarding sales and service program and then asks for dealers to partner with the manufacturer to support training efforts. Such outcomes resonate with the audience.

Draw up the plan. Think in terms of advertising. You want people to see, hear, and feel the message in many places, at multiple times. Consider live presentations, videos, email, and Websites. Create a chart of to whom, when, and how often the message will be repeated and in what venue. For trainers, that's typically a snap. Matching a marketing effort to training is a matter of matching course schedules to a promotional activity, be it a kickoff or an email reminder about course dates.

Preview the course. A good way to generate buzz about a new training initiative is to offer a preview, either live or on the Web. Trainers can borrow the idea of a movie trailer by inviting people to participate in an abbreviated session or take a preview of course materials on the intranet.

Execute the plan. It's one thing to plan, it's another thing to do it. Training lead-

ers must deliver the message, and the people helping to shape the message must insist on carrying out the plan.

Reiterate. When it comes to big, important messages, saying it once isn't enough. Reiteration and reinforcement are core concepts in adult learning. Messages should be repeated. People may not hear them the first time, or not be receptive to the concept at first.

Merchandise the training message. The message begins with the leader, but it can be extended through email, banners, even television. Don't forget the buttons and logo t-shirts. And if the message is important enough, put it on a hat!

Listen up!

Don't forget the other part of effective communications: listening. Too often, planning supercedes listening. It's easy to see why. Planning is an active process; listening is passive.

So, don't sit back. Trainers need to be proactive. Plan in advance how you can get feedback. Make it easy for people to react to your message. Invite people to email their responses and suggestions. Better yet, do a meet-and-greet. The more open you are as a leader, the better the quality of feedback you'll get. Learning and performance professionals need to put themselves in a position where they can ask for and receive feedback.

Planning the leadership message can build trust and generate results for individuals, teams, and organizations.

John Baldoni is a leadership communications and development consultant based in Ann Arbor, Michigan; www.LC21.com; jbaldoni@LC21.com.

*Send short, how-to articles on training basics to **Fundamentals**, T+D, 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313-2043; fundamentals@astd.org.*

In Upcoming Issues:

T+D

How to Negotiate With a Training Vendor

Part 5 of the Series on Enterprise E-Learning

Socially Responsible Organizations

How Training Suppliers Respond to Competitive Movements in the E-Learning Space

And in the Departments:

Career Development in Depth

Web Tips

True Tales From the Workplace

And much much more...