

How a Training Committee Helps Solve Your Problem

by

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The "Training Committee" is a tool that the Training Director can use to help him sell top management on training, to get the cooperation of line supervisors and to assure himself that his training fits the needs of the organization. In one swoop it cuts through the training man's most difficult problems. The "Training Committee" can be used in large or small companies. It is as effective for the new training man as for the one who had been in the position a number of years.

The basic idea is simple. As a training man, you are an expert on communicating ideas and developing proper attitudes, knowledge, and skills for the job. In each company there are people who, through experience, know the problems of their part of the organization. They can provide the content of the training material, or at least guide you in choosing the material and the approach which is likely to be most effective in the individual company situation.

By proper choice of people and skillful handling of the committee, you can reap many more benefits than those which appear on the surface. You can get the skeptical member of top management behind you. You can convince the tough line supervisor that there is value in training. You can turn luke-

warm onlookers into enthusiastic promoters of training.

The "Training Committee" technique is of particular value today when the training director may find himself faced with the problem of developing training for new skills, attitudes or objectives. It cuts directly across the need for much of the research that sometimes goes into developing a plan or program. It does this by bringing together the minds that can provide various parts of the answer. It is almost as if you were stirring up a chemical reaction. The Training Director acts as a catalyst that makes the minds interact, and the result is the synthesis of something new and useful.

By seeking the advice and assistance of such individuals, you bring them into the process of developing the training program. They have had a voice in determining the kind of training that is to be given. Instead of being on the outside, prone to criticize and find fault, they become involved in or, to use a military term, "committed to" the training.

First find a problem about which top management is concerned. Suggest training as a solution and make this proposition: "You have people around here who know the answers to what should be done. If you will appoint the people who can give me the answers on

what should be done, and how it should be done, I will see that this material is developed into a training plan that will put over your ideas and solve your problem."

The executive concerned will probably request your opinion on who should be appointed to the committee. Avoid naming the people whom you think should serve. Point out that you don't know all of the problems involved. The executive, on the other hand, knows which people will have the information and the point of view he wishes to put over. You may, however, suggest that the executive should appoint some of his people who are likely to take a pessimistic or "tough" view of the proceedings. This will help to assure that the program is down to earth. At the same time, it helps to assure success by getting the critics to work with you. No one is likely to criticize something which he himself has helped to develop. It's a practical extension of the old political maxim, "If you can't lick 'em, join 'em."

If possible, try to tie the name of this group in with some common function that your people are familiar with. At General Motors, for example, where styling and design is often carried on by a group of people, the term "Design Group" is given to the committee that develops or "designs" the training. In an organization where research may play an important role, you might call your committee a "Development Committee." Our organization has no such tradition, so we chose the simple name "Training Committee."

When the committee has been chosen, it is good practice to have the executive

concerned notify the individual members. His memo to the individuals chosen should emphasize their responsibility for guiding the Training Director in developing training that will do the job. When the group comes together for its first meeting, it is highly desirable to have a top administrative person "kick off" the project. He again should emphasize that they are to provide the expert information and the Training Director will provide the training know-how.

As the training man, you act as conference leader for the group. Before getting down to business, lay down the ground rules. Point out that you are not an expert in the material to be covered, and that you will "play dumb" and ask all the questions that occur to you as a novice in the field to be covered. The general procedure is to agree upon the problem and the general approach to be taken. An over-all outline is prepared and the committee then proceeds to take up the outline point by point, deciding specifically what is to be done and what is to be covered.

It is important that the members of the committee agree that all decisions be unanimous. This helps assure that each member of the committee will be strongly behind the training when it is completed. You can make the potent argument that if this small group cannot agree upon fundamentals, it is hardly likely that a larger group will be 100% convinced.

Once the committee is set up and operating under agreed upon ground rules, you have a fairly simple job. You act as a combination conference leader

and secretary. If the group is large, you use standard blackboard technique for developing material, resolving conflicts, and clarifying points. Each meeting is basically a "developmental conference." You ask questions and guide the group toward a concrete decision. You avoid volunteering information unless it is purely a matter of training techniques.

In our experience, it is not generally wise to attempt to develop the material word for word. Rather, it is better to get the general idea and to have the committee agree that these ideas will be translated into teachable form. The training man then proceeds to write the material and find the training aids necessary.

When the plan, program, or course is in final form, it should be reviewed with the training committee. It should be understood that this is the last time

for bringing up objections. In order to impress upon each person his individual responsibility, you may suggest that the transmittal letter to management might well be signed by individual members. This helps to assure that no member of the committee will claim he was not in accord with the group or that his name has been left out.

By using this approach, the Training Director can assume his rightful place in the organization. He can be accepted as an expert on training and will avoid the "professor" tag where he is looked upon as an ivory tower expert with little down-to-earth experience. As he gradually works his way through the organization, handling various training problems in this way, he can sell individual supervisors on his value to them. When all are convinced, he will find himself accepted as a day-to-day member of the operating team.

The Editor Travels

Last January 20th I took off from New York for the Pacific Coast on a four week's business trip. It takes from 3:00 p.m. to 11:30 p.m., same day, to get from New York to Los Angeles by air these days, but the difference between the ice and snow of winter in the East and the warm sunshine of Southern California made me think that perhaps the California Chamber of Commerce might be right.

It was 89 degrees in the shade the day I went down to San Diego and was met by Lieutenant Robert "Bob" J. Karrow, Training Director for the Police

Department of the City of San Diego who is secretary of the recently formed San Diego Training Directors' Association. We had never met before and I was much impressed by the young looking policeman in summer uniform who drove up in front of the U. S. Grant Hotel. We talked about his work on the police force, especially his course in Mob Control for Industries. Bob drove me to the office of A. F. "Gus" Hohl, Corporation Training Director for Consolidated-Vultee Aircraft Corporation, who shuttles between the San Diego and Fort Worth plants keeping up with this company's extensive training programs.