



Nancy Hemmenway

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I don't believe in sending people to school. I believe in on-the-job training that you can apply that day," says Nancy Hemmenway, senior vice president for HR and administration at AMB Property Corporation in San Francisco.

AMB operates warehouses at airports and ports of call throughout North America, Europe, and Asia. The company has experienced strong growth in the past several years. In 2000, there were 175 employees, all at domestic locations within the United States. In 2006, the company employs 320 people in offices across the globe. The employee base has also gotten more diverse in terms of role and skill level. Formerly, it was primarily a group of real estate investors working under an outsourced model, but the company has since brought many functions in-house.

"Before, our employees didn't have to manage through people," says Hemmenway, who joined the company in November 2000 and describes her role as building the next generation of leaders at AMB. She does that through a variety of methods and focuses on skill development that is tied to a defined set of competencies. However, those competencies are used primarily for placement and promotion. "We focus on talent rather than on skills, knowledge, and abilities," Hemmenway says.

Her preferred method for honing talent within AMB is internally developed programs with a strong coaching component. "In the years that I've been involved in learning and development, I've found that learning opportunities combined with coaching make a huge difference," she says.

How so? "Coaching helps people make the transition between the learning and work environments. It helps them connect the dots and find real-time applications for the learning."

Hemmenway admits that coaching can be an intimidating—and sometimes intense—experience. She knows how people feel when they're asked to enter a new coaching relationship, saying that the first time she was coached, "I was scared to death."

Why do people find coaching frightening? "Being developed is not about being a better person. It is about learning to be more effective in your job in order to get better business results. That can be a very hard sell for people."

For a leadership seminar rolled out for company vice presidents in 2005 and through the eventual global rollout of a management training program that will affect up to 20 percent of AMB employees, Hemmenway is playing the role of coach herself. She makes biweekly coaching calls to trainees in between the course's three sessions, each 30 days apart. Even so, she does not call herself a coach, having received no formal training.

"I am really good at helping people see their blind spots—what may be stopping them from achieving their highest potential. When they do that, it opens up a whole new world."

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