

Four by Four

FINDING TIME FOR TQM TRAINING

It's a movement whose time has come. U.S. organizations struggling to shake off the malaise of recession and regain their competitive edge in a vastly expanded global marketplace are jumping en masse aboard the quality bandwagon.

From industry to government, from education to nonprofits, the gospel of total quality management is winning converts and influencing balance sheets.

Most quality gurus emphasize that training is an essential part of any serious total quality management program. What they don't usually explain is how to shoehorn this additional training into people's already skintight schedules.

How do you find the time for TQM training? We asked four experts, including two quality leaders who helped their organizations win the prestigious Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. All four of the people we interviewed listed the commitment of top management as a prerequisite to a successful quality push. Without top-down support, they agreed, any time spent on quality training is wasted.

"If senior leadership is not going to commit to this new way of managing the company," summarized executive Michael E. Spiess, a Baldrige alumnus, "then my recommendation is 'Don't do it.'"

Our experts came up with a creative menu of suggestions designed to facilitate TQM training despite the double constraints of thick calendars and thin budgets. In addition, they suggested ways to ensure that quality lessons are actually applied on the job, in order to give the total quality management concept every chance to take root and bear fruit within the organization.



Michael Northrup



INTERVIEW

MICHAEL E. SPIESS

Four experts offer tips on how to squeeze total-quality training into your company's already skintight schedules.

Michael Spiess introduced and supervised the quality initiative that resulted in a 1990 Baldrige Award for the Wallace Company, a Houston-based industrial-products distributor. Now a Baldrige examiner, Spiess is executive vice-president of ViaNet, 1140 West Loop North, Houston, TX 77055.

I'm a big advocate of training. One of the things we did at Wallace—and we did it very, very well—was training.

I don't believe that any company is going to ever reach its potential until it starts really training its people. Most companies don't; we do a very poor job of it in this country. We will

invest in new plant and equipment, but we don't invest in the most precious asset we have—our people. Until we cause people to grow, it's going to be very difficult for us to be as competitive as we need to be in this new global economy.

Probably one of the biggest failings we have in American industry today is a lack of training and, I think, almost a lack of awareness of the need for training. We need to realize that if you train people properly, you reduce the cost of operating your organization. You enhance productivity. You enhance creativity. You enhance innovation. You position yourself to become more competitive. And that's what we need to be doing.

There is a direct correlation between how much you invest in your people and how the quality of the product or services you produce is viewed. I also think there's a direct correlation between training, employee satisfaction, and customer satisfaction. All three are linked.

Spieß's recommendations

1. Start with the wholehearted commitment of top management. A quality initiative has to be led by senior executives. If it's not, the program is going to fail; you're going to create great expectations that you will never be able to fulfill, and that's not right. So leadership is the most critical element in this whole quality process. Without it, spending any time on quality training is pointless.

2. Don't waste time on premature or unnecessary training.

There is some initial training that everybody needs, and that is quality awareness training. This training should introduce the various quality tools that will be used and answer the questions: "Why are we doing this?" and "How will it benefit the participants?" Those questions have to be answered in the training process, and they have to be answered by the senior leadership of the company. I do not believe you can have outside people answer them for you.

So, everybody ought to have certain basic levels of training with respect to quality, but I don't think one suit fits all. Companies make mistakes there. Everybody jumps

into this mass immersion, and most often people are not ready for it, because they're not prepared to start using it. And the retention level's not there if you don't start reinforcing your training on a day-to-day basis.

After you go through that initial immersion, you've got to go back into your organization and conduct a needs assessment. Figure out what's right and what's wrong. And I mean talk to everybody. A lot of training issues are going to come out of that.

Then you can say, "Well, now that I know what's wrong, what kind of training do I need to put in place to correct these things so people can do their jobs more efficiently and effectively?"

Based on the needs assessment, you need to start some departmental training, some team training, and also some specialized training for people you're going to charge with specific responsibilities, such as being team facilitators or statistical process control coordinators.

3. Senior leadership is going to have to change the organization to accommodate training. In other words, maybe the way the organization is structured is not the most efficient way to drive the quality process. After all, quality is about change. So you're going to have to make a decision to train people and you're going to have to make the time available to train them, period.

It has to be a discipline. Senior leadership needs to send the message that it's committed to the process, that it's going to change some of the structure of the organization, that it's going to make the time, and that it's going to ask others to assume additional work loads while you're out being trained—and vice versa while they're out being trained.

At Wallace, we incorporated training sessions into each employee's work schedule. If people know that two months from now they've got training, then believe me, the work load will be accommodated somehow to take care of that.

As people begin to use their quality training on the job, you'll find that they develop efficiencies and better ways of doing things that allow them to do the jobs they're

intended to do. As it is, whether we want to admit it or not, most people's jobs are a firefight. And that's the worst thing I can think of—going to work every day, knowing you're going to have to put out fires instead of really being creative in the way you do your job, instead of trying to improve your job and focus on the needs of the company.

So the time spent in training is an investment.

4. Conduct after-hours training and offer incentives for attendance. At Wallace, we did some Friday and Saturday training, and we paid people to be there. To further communicate the value of the training, in every single case, the senior leadership of the company was there with them.

You can also bring in some training. Most product suppliers, for example, are delighted to come in and help you with product training. They're an untapped resource. You can train over lunch—maybe furnish lunch one day a week or one day a month and teach something in that period of time. You can also train for an hour after work. Our manufacturers often came in from five to six o'clock, brought dinner to everybody, and then led training sessions. We always planned these after-hours sessions well in advance. They weren't just sprung on people.



INTERVIEW
PAM SCHMIDT

Pam Schmidt is director of quality for the American Society for Training and Development, 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313-2043.

The only way you can find time for TQM in an organization is to integrate it into current systems. To oversimplify, I would say TQM needs to be integrated into four key systems within the organization—the overall communication system, the leader-

ship system, the strategic planning system, and the performance management system.

In addition, trainers can integrate quality training into existing training programs by using consistent language, helping managers learn to coach rather than supervise, teaching people how to run effective meetings and use new tools in problem-solving, and so forth.

Overall, I hope we can begin to teach people that we want to continuously improve the way we do our work—that we're not trying to change the person; we're trying to improve the process.

Schmidt's recommendations

1. It's probably a toss-up as to what comes first, leadership or communication systems. But when it comes to total quality and finding time for it, I think the most significant tool is information. Information is power; it enables people to make decisions.

At ASTD, for example, where we're in the middle of a TQM initiative, I don't think life is changing as radically as the way we *think* about life is changing. In order to help people think differently, it's critical for trainers to provide information at all levels, to open channels so that people begin to incorporate the new thinking into their everyday work.

To make time for this communication, it's important to use existing systems. For example, I suggest integrating quality news into the current employee newsletter rather than isolating it in a separate TQM newsletter. All other formal communication vehicles—such as memoranda and bulletin-board postings—need to be in sync, too.

Another simple way to communicate the quality message would be staging small-group discussions and cross-functional department discussions to solicit employee feedback and suggestions and to give employees an opportunity to hear from each other outside their typical work groups.

2. In terms of leadership, if we're really going to integrate TQM into the organization, we first need to involve the managers and help them understand their role, particularly the distinction between facilitating and doing.

I think one of the key mistakes I could make as director of quality, for example, is to assume that I have to be a doer more than a facilitator. It's important that I be a quality champion to keep the information flow going and to bring things to people's attention, but it's more important that I train other managers to lead the process and to become comfortable with this new way of thinking about work.

We also need a clear understanding of what empowerment really means, both at the management level and the staff level. To some people, empowerment implies, "Oh boy, everybody gets to make all the decisions!" Not true. Empowerment means you have the right to speak up, but not necessarily to decide. Some decisions are command decisions. Some are collaborative. Some are consensus. So managers shouldn't worry that they're about to lose their source of power because of a quality initiative.

3. Another key to making time for quality training, which requires support from the top, is integrating your philosophy of quality into your strategic-planning process.

To me, quality really means thinking differently. You have to think about what you're doing. Why are you doing it? Who are you doing it for? What's the outcome? If that thinking process is appreciated and integrated into the strategic-planning process, goals tend to be a little more realistic, either in terms of how resources are applied or what the time line looks like. This perspective is critical to a long-term understanding of what you're going to accomplish through TQM and how you make time for it.

4. Finally, you should integrate the TQM process into your performance-management system.

Here, I would say that making time for quality training means you've got to be prepared to start small. Even if you haven't got the time, the energy, the resources, or the support to overhaul the whole system, you can start with some of the subtleties, such as the informal recognition system. If people are recognized and rewarded for participating in quality training or using qual-

ity tools, they tend to want to make time for that.

It can be as simple an effort as looking for opportunities to reward people. If you find someone doing something commendable and really achieving results, then you make sure that gets in your newsletter.

A lot of people would argue with me on this idea of starting small, but you just can't do it all at once, so you've got to take a look at what you think your needs are and what you think would motivate people to make time for quality activities, and then start there. For example, here at ASTD, we probably have 100 processes that we could choose to improve using a quality approach. But with only 120 employees, if we went after all 100 processes, we'd kill ourselves. Then we wouldn't serve anyone.

So we really went through an elaborate process to decide which processes we would start with. As a result, we have formal process-improvement teams in place with very specific goals to be achieved within a reasonable time frame. Overall, it's a long process. I would say that to see any long-term results, you're talking about a three- to five-year organizational period.



INTERVIEW
TOM HUBERTY

Tom Huberty is manager of workforce development for Minnesota Technology, a publicly funded private corporation. You can reach him at Minnesota Technology, 111 Third Avenue South, Suite 400, Minneapolis, MN 55401.

Total quality management is really a systems approach, of which training is only one part. In addition to education, there must be organizational commitment, a communications plan, a marketing plan, an awards and recognition plan, an implementation plan, a budget, and

some means of measurement and evaluation. To make the whole process congruent, the training director must work very closely with those in charge of the other entities.

The systems approach will result in a synergism that ultimately saves time, because employees will receive multiple TQM messages from many parts of the organization.

Huberty's recommendations

1. First, have a solid deployment plan that includes executive and management presenters. The famous Xerox quality story is a story of "cascading" the quality training through the organization. So the first training audience should be the top team.

ment, which equals continuous business success, which equals continuous employment."

2. Budget enough money and time for quality-improvement training, including the costs of overtime pay for after-hours training. Many small companies, in particular, need to keep everyone on the production line; in those cases, TQM training is best held after regular working hours. Be realistic about on-the-job time constraints and plan around them. Again, an organization sends a message of commitment to the TQM process when it "completely" budgets for quality training.

3. Use accelerated training techniques that tie basic concepts into

extra time at all, by using quality symbols and shorthand phrases in corporate communications. For example, the Baldrige-winning companies often put the Baldrige "bug" at the bottom of their stationery.

4. Provide a context for the quality-improvement training effort and make it truly value-added for each participant. If employees can't use what they've learned about the quality process, then the time for training has been a waste. To make sure your training time is well spent, each session must be related to the tasks people perform on the job and must provide useful tools that can be applied immediately.

In the quality-awareness phase of training, there's sometimes a tendency to "round up the usual suspects" and "sentence them" to training, often using out-of-the-box packaged programs. But any packaged materials used must include learning tools that can be tailored to fit follow-up action plans back on the job. Employees should leave training with plans for changes of behavior that they can apply on the job, which are directly related or even symbolic of the learning they've just acquired.

"TQM DOESN'T HAPPEN IN A VACUUM.
IT BECOMES PART OF A COMPANY'S PAST,
PRESENT, AND FUTURE"

This initial training will help you win crucial corporate support by helping top managers understand the need for their commitment to the TQM process. And solid corporate commitment saves time by preventing rework. Without top-down support, all TQM training is wasted.

Top leaders also should be trained to deliver parts of the training to the next level of managers. Involving top management in training is the lever that will result in commitment to the quality process throughout the organization. If the top team is dedicating calendar dates to personally delivering TQM training, it sends a powerful message about the company's commitment to quality improvement.

In addition, executives or top managers can gain further employee commitment by connecting the TQM effort to both the broader business picture and the individual employee. In effect, they should tell employees, "We're involved in the total quality management process for competitive reasons, and you are the most important part of that. That's why we're making this investment in you as an employee, because continuous training equals continuous improve-

ment, which equals continuous business success, which equals continuous employment."

the organizational culture. Anchoring your training in what people already know is a big time-saver. And they know about their company, its successes, and lessons learned from challenges. So start by raising the visibility of this common knowledge and then connecting it to quality principles and concepts. After all, TQM doesn't happen in a vacuum; it becomes part of a company's history, present, and future.

Design energy-generating learning devices such as simulations, action plans, games, and songs. Use cultural icons to customize these exercises for your company. Aim for the right mixture of seriousness and fun to help hold people's attention.

For example, when I was a quality leader at Northwest Airlines, we used a simulation—building paper airplanes—to teach employees about the supplier/customer relationship. We taught error prevention and cost of quality with a humorous video tour of the baggage-delivery system, hosted by a garment-bag-clad character named "Sam Sonite, the American Tourister."

In addition, you can reinforce training concepts without taking any



INTERVIEW

KAREN K. JOHNSON

Karen Johnson, project manager of sales training for Xerox, was previously a quality manager with Xerox's Business Products and Systems Group, a 1989 Baldrige winner. You can reach her at Xerox Corporation, 101 Continental Boulevard, El Segundo, CA 90245.

In a way, this is a hard question for me, because I wonder: how can you *not* find time for training? Quality implementation is a long-term, big-picture effort, and training is an integral part of it.

At Xerox, we officially kicked off TQM in 1984. By 1988, 100,000 peo-

ple had been trained. When I say trained, I mean we mandate a total of 48 hours of quality training for every Xerox employee worldwide. We start with a half-day of quality orientation, and then we have five-and-a-half days of quality training and problem solving.

Johnson's recommendations

1. A quality initiative must be driven from the top down and then reinforced by managers. We're able to give the necessary time for training at Xerox because it's a mandate. When you have a person like David Kearns, our former CEO and chairman of the board, who believes in TQM so strongly and invested in it, you don't have to worry about finding the time. It's dictated that you will.

2. Make sure employees see the benefit of the training they're going through. The reason our training works is that people see it's in their best interests. You can put people in a room, but unless they really embrace what you're talking about, nothing will change. It's easier for them to set aside the time, even if it's dictated, if they understand what's in it for them.

Specifically, we emphasize the benefits of TQM through something we call family-group start-up. People are trained in the groups they work in; we call all people who report to one manager a family group.

The first part of their training involves having them agree on who their customers are and what they produce; in other words, their outputs. We emphasize that once they come to a consensus on those points, the training will help them improve their work processes and make their jobs easier. Then people are more willing, even though they have to go to training, to go and learn the material, rather than just sit there.

Also, because people are trained in a family group, we don't have to worry that somebody will go off to a training center and learn some wonderful process, but that no one else on the team will know what he or she is doing. Research has shown that when that happens, people don't continue the behavior. Our people are more willing to invest the time for training and are more likely

to use what they learn, because they learn and use the processes with their peers.

3. Another thing that helps people find the time for training is knowing that the quality initiative is not going to be just a "flavor of the month" project, but a way of life, a way of doing business, and a way of working.

One of the things we've done to reinforce that concept and keep our training alive is something we call LUTI, which means "learn, use, teach, and inspect."

Let's say you're a manager. You go through quality training once with your boss and your peers, and then you actually help teach part of the training to your direct reports, your family group. Finally, you inspect how your direct reports do with the process.

So another key factor in our training is that the managers are charged with inspecting the process and providing directions and suggestions for improvement. We also teach them how to do that—so they must find time not only for quality training, but also for inspection workshops. Then they are evaluated, and they have to evaluate their employees as "quality role models." These evaluations are pertinent in terms of promotion.

So the training actually becomes an enabler to upward mobility and recognition, because the better trained you are, the more you can embody TQM principles and the more recognition and rewards you receive.

4. Finally, look at training as an investment. For example, when managers inspect the outputs of their group, they're actually saving time, because they don't have to repeat work when they've understood the customer requirements and "done it right the first time."

So yes, we spend time on training, but we gain much more time in improved work processes and improved customer satisfaction. The whole bottom line of TQM for us is improving the satisfaction of our customers.

This month's "Four by Four" was compiled by Sandra Millers Younger. If you have ideas for future topics or would like to be interviewed, write to "Four by Four" Training & Development, 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313-2043.

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