

Training One-on-One

BY DOROTHY LEEDS

If you want to get in great physical shape, call a personal trainer. If you want employees to reach their fullest potential, try one-on-one coaching.

IN THE WORLD of physical fitness, people who are serious about getting in shape often hire private trainers to help them reach their goals. Today, corporate America is also using one-on-one training to help employees attain their personal best.

Last year, I noticed that my business was growing markedly in a particular area. When I spoke to other trainers—both internal corporate trainers and outside consultants—about this phenomenon, they, too, had noticed a trend.

The trend is a shift in the corporate arena from group training to individual coaching. In the past year, my training business has grown to 25 percent individual coaching. I've found these one-on-one sessions to be intense, stimulating, and extremely effective.

In the beginning, I thought individual training was just a tool for skills training. But, I soon realized it is competency- and computer-based as well. In fact, my colleagues and I really couldn't think of any area where individual training would not be effective.

For most companies in today's cost-cutting environment, individual training is a wise investment. Take this scenario: In the past, the Acme Bandage Company has held a yearly communications training seminar for its 15 national sales managers. This three-day affair cost \$50,000. Out of the 15 trainees, two did not really need the training, but since all managers were required to attend, they had to be included. Three other managers were concerned about leaving their clients. They had a hard time concentrating during the seminar, and one left a day early. Because of an upcoming merger,

four of the managers would be gone within a year (although they didn't know it at the time). The remaining six trainees were willing, active participants—but none of them had enough time for practice during the three-day seminar (because of the size of the group), and there was no follow-up.

In three days, Acme Bandage spent \$50,000 for 15 people. This money was wasted on nine of the people. For \$12,000 to \$36,000, six people who could really use the training could each have had more than 20 hours of one-on-one coaching—and most would not even need the full 20 hours.

Individual coaching is more than just a good financial investment. Debby Blatt, director of training for Kay-bee Toys, believes that it is an investment in the individual. "One-on-one training ensures that an individual's developmental needs are met. It also gives individuals more of a stake in their own development," says Blatt.

Advantages of one-on-one

Here are some of the advantages of one-on-one coaching—for trainees, companies, and trainers:

Smaller financial commitment. Vince Arcetti, training manager of a large food company, explains one reason for individual training: "One of the main reasons is economics," he says. "Budget cuts and downsizing mean there are fewer and fewer opportunities to send people out of town, or even out of their offices, for training seminars. With so many major projects put on hold because of reengineering and reorganization, relatively minor projects such as individualized coaching can move ahead because smaller expendi-

tures don't require group consensus."

Just-in-time training. "With individual training, employees get specific, constructive criticism," says Missy Godfrey, associate publisher of *Worth* magazine. "But one of the biggest reasons I've switched to one-on-one coaching is that my people can get training when they need it. If two of my employees are making major presentations in the next two months, I can schedule several individual sessions for them. I don't have to provide the training for the other people in the department until they need it, too."

Flexible scheduling. Gloria Kessler, director of corporate services at Condé Nast, has other reasons for using one-on-one training. "Many of my high-level executives do not have the time to participate in group training, and they have very specific needs," she says.

Ego savers. Most of the training that I do is in public speaking and communications. I work with individuals on all levels. Some of the top executives, who need help in a particular area, prefer not to be in a group situation with their employees. Or, they may be working on confidential presentations. Whatever their reasons, they see individual coaching as the solution.

Top executives also appreciate one-on-one when it comes to computer training, says Harland Hunter, manager, the Forum Corporation. "Often the highest level people have the least amount of computer knowledge," he says. "It's an ego-saver for them to be able to learn this new skill without anyone else watching. One-on-one is valuable because you can pinpoint a trainee's needs and present highly-leveraged, timely training."

Detailed evaluation and practice. Imagine yourself in a classroom where everyone is vying for the trainer's attention. You may make one or two presentations and spend a lot of time learning from others. That learning environment has value. But, in an individual coaching situation, you could make four or five presentations and have them evaluated in greater detail. If you follow the maxim that you learn by doing, you will have more "doing" time. When you increase the "doing" time, you make training much more effective.

Customized training. Most companies are committed to training, but that commitment is shifting. A more diverse workforce is changing the way that training is delivered. Group training programs, which follow a one-size-fits-all philosophy, are being replaced by just-in-time. This new kind of training is delivered when employees need new skills, and designed according to individual skill levels and training needs.

Skill building for trainers. Individual coaching may take the trainer's skills to a higher level. That's because most trainers use new skills during individual coaching. In traditional classroom training, trainers need highly developed platform and performance skills. As an individual coach, the trainer needs to be more of a subject expert.

One-on-one allows for more constructive, specific criticism. Coaching can be tailored to the needs of the individual trainee. One-on-one can be extremely satisfying because the trainer can observe the trainees' progress over an extended time.

Mistakes to avoid

Just as there are advantages to one-on-one training, there are pitfalls as well. Most of these occur because of the more casual atmosphere of individualized training. Here's what not to do:

Don't wing it. No trainer would go into a two- or three-day seminar without a lesson plan. Yet the temptation not to prepare for coaching is very strong. It may seem plausible to walk into the room and say, "So, what do you want to work on today?" Or to ask the trainee, "Where did we leave off last time?" But to make the session really valuable, you have to plan your time. For instance, how are you going to be-

COMPONENTS OF A ONE-ON-ONE LESSON PLAN

Here's a lesson plan guide to help you prepare for one-on-one training.

Motivation. What are you going to concentrate on today? Why does the trainee need to learn this particular skill? How will the trainee benefit from this skill?

Subject and time frame. Will you be reviewing previously taught material, new material, or both? How long will you take to cover each area?

Goals. What are your behavioral objectives? After the session, do you expect the trainee to have a full grasp of the material, or will it take more than one session for that to occur?

Homework. Every session should end with a homework assignment so that the trainee has something to practice and prepare for the next meeting.

gin the lesson? You should set a strong professional tone. If you allow yourself and the trainee to chit-chat for the first 15 minutes, you're both wasting time.

Don't be too casual. In most cases, training sessions are set up between you and the individual trainee (as opposed to the boss scheduling the training times). If a scheduling conflict arises, the trainee may feel free to cancel or postpone the appointment. Therefore, you must set ground rules before the training begins. You should send your trainee (and his or her boss) a letter outlining your procedures. The letter might include

- ▶ a list of equipment you'll need for the training
- ▶ instructions to the trainee regarding preparation for the first meeting
- ▶ your cancellation policy.

I let my trainees know I need at least 24-hour notification of cancellation or postponement—otherwise they will be billed.

Don't gossip. Some trainees may feel that they can unload their work-related problems on you and tell you all about the office politics that are keeping them from getting ahead. You are not there to be a psychologist or a

shoulder to cry on. Be sympathetic, but steer trainees back on track if they go off in an inappropriate direction.

The five steps of coaching

Here are the five major steps in the individual coaching process:

Step 1: mini needs analysis. The needs analysis may be conducted with the trainee, the trainee's supervisor, or both. Usually, the initial analysis is made between the trainer and the supervisor. The first questions will let you know what the boss expects the training to accomplish. Some questions you may want to ask include:

- ▶ What are the main problems you would like this trainee to correct?
- ▶ Can you give me an example of a time when this problem occurred?
- ▶ Is the trainee willing or reluctant to participate in the training?
- ▶ What other training has the trainee had?
- ▶ What specifically would you like to see accomplished as a result of this training?

Here is where you must probe and clarify until you get answers that will give you behavioral objectives. The supervisor may say, "Alice needs to work on her presentation style." This vague statement does not give the information that's needed to improve Alice's skills. So you might ask, "What exactly is it about Alice's style that is a problem?" The boss might then say, "She speaks in a monotone. After a few minutes, no one is paying attention to her and she never makes eye contact with any of the people in the room." Now you have some behavioral objectives for the initial sessions with Alice.

Step 2: first meeting. As in any training session, the first goal is to establish objectives. In group training, that is usually done before you develop the training program. In individual training, you must develop your objectives from three perspectives:

- ▶ the person who recommended the training
- ▶ the trainee
- ▶ your own evaluation.

It's important that you clarify objectives. The trainee's supervisor may have certain objectives in mind, and they may or may not be the same as the trainee's objectives. Be sure the trainee clearly understands the goals from the beginning.

The second goal is to evaluate the trainee's current skill level. I ask trainees (before the actual meeting) to prepare a short presentation so that I can see them in action, compare my evaluation with the supervisor's, and make sure that the behavioral objectives are on target.

The third goal is to establish rapport. All trainers know the impor-

tance of establishing rapport with their trainees. But, in one-on-one coaching, it's even more important. Remember: This is not a popularity contest. Of course, you want the trainee to like you, but it's more important that you establish trust and respect. They must know that everything that is said and done in the training session is confidential.



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Make it clear that you will be reporting their progress to their supervisors, but that what goes on in each session is only between the two of you.

Step 3: long-range planning. After this meeting you should prepare written reports for the trainee and for the supervisor. The reports should include observations of the trainee's skill levels, what training you think is appropriate, how you plan to accomplish the stated goals, and how long you think the process will take.

This step is not usually necessary in group training, which takes place within a limited time. But, in one-on-one, you often set the time frame. You should also be aware that group training methods may not work as well in one-on-one.

Step 4: individual lesson plans. Although, as we said before, there is a great temptation to wing it in one-on-one, you'll need to prepare a lesson plan for each session. (See sidebar.)

Step 5: final evaluation and follow-up. Take careful notes during and after each session. If you're working with an executive who is very busy, there can be long intervals between training sessions. These notes will not only help you remember what went on in each session so that you can build skills for the next one, they will help you write the report for the trainee's supervisor. The report should include areas or skills the trainee still needs work on and how the supervisor can help.

One great advantage of one-on-one training is the ease of follow-up. It's a lot easier to follow up on one individual than on a class of 20. And it is a lot easier to come back for one or two brush-up sessions.

In the future, will all training be individualized? I doubt it. However, most training departments probably will offer a combination of group training and individual coaching. And, as more organizations recognize the financial and educational benefits of one-on-one, this will become an even greater part of the training mix. ■

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