

Last But Not Least

When all else fails, say some personnel officers, provide training. The problem with this sure-fire cure for apathy arises when the time comes to measure training's long-term effect on employee performance and morale. But vexing as that might be, training should be a higher priority than it is in most organizations.

Not insoluble, the problem is multifaceted. Although cost and other benefits can be measured through simple or elaborate surveys, confidence in such routine evaluations remains low in organizations that cut training first when there is a budget crunch. Ironically, the cut often is justified as a way to trim the overhead of conducting studies that support the need in the first place.

The human resource function is often an extension of employee relations and benefits, but seldom is training considered a priority budget program. Recently, a colleague in the private sector admitted that the best place to pad the budget is training, because the funds can be confiscated later and reallocated to other priority programs.

If this occurs in your organization, can you identify the so-called top priority programs? Administrators often bluff about the hidden costs of keeping up with employees salaries and building maintenance overhead. Who dares disagree with the corporate budget administrators? Certainly not training officers whose heads remain a hair's breadth away from the chopping block in any given quarter.

As a result, training officers are hard pressed to justify programs. Proving training need or effectiveness may expend more dollars than the program cost to develop, implement and maintain. And even after offering such proof, some still may not be convinced that training pays off.

Some argue that training can be done via computers—and it is—or that recruitment and selection training can be done by video cassettes. Nevertheless, interpersonal skills continue to be valuable to employment, training

and employee relations programs. The truth of the matter is that those who control the dollars would like to believe otherwise.

How many CPAs are asked to double as public relations personnel? Precious few, no doubt. Yet, how many training coordinators or personnel officers are expected to be experts at human relations, in addition to knowing the technical guidelines of legal operations?

The importance of training must not be underestimated. It is valuable for orientation, policy, OJT skills and application, upward mobility, morale and better performance. However, the major arguments for eliminating training are vague and incomplete.

Sometime in the near future controllers must develop the belief that training has merit. They must be made to realize that training keeps the organization healthy. Training officers can help. In addition, the controllers must find other areas to pad and cut.

Part of the problem in a pro-training campaign is selecting credible trainers. Some budget officers are quick to suggest that supervisors make the best trainers. This may be valid for OJT skills and procedures, but employees respond best to highly credible sources.

If the budget is healthy, consultants can be called in. Despite training's low priority in most organizations, consulting remains a lucrative business. This contradiction may be attributable to the fact that outside consultants can go to many companies for one or two days, and this minimum commitment apparently satisfies a temporary organizational need. Budget officers may then point to the last seminar or workshop to convince themselves that minimum effort can take care of problems until the next big crisis. But crisis management is an old buzz word for lack of preventative maintenance.

Training is the best way to ward off major problems and maintain a working system. Training brings people together. Training offers a means to

improve employee morale and status in the organization. Training and development go hand-in-hand.

Obviously, formidable obstacles can stand in the way of successful training. Training officers are the only ones who can clear them. They must stop living from workshop to workshop in fear of being axed, and develop a more persuasive tone with less cumbersome ways of justifying programs. They should examine less pricey ways of selling their credibility. No one ever said this kind of information has to be expensive.

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Any takers?

Having perused the pages of *Training & Development Journal* for 10, these many months, I have noted a lack of discussion about several topics that must be addressed by all serious HRD professionals. Because I am already overcommitted myself, I cannot take these topics on, but I would delight in seeing articles on the following subjects:

1. Suggestology
2. Imagineering
3. Telefarming
4. The Chemical Cleric
5. Brainomics
6. Facilitation
7. Future/futurer/futurest: How rich is your mix?
8. Training Your Ancestors: A Holistic Approach
9. Your employees, your furniture: Your opportunity
10. Outplacing Organizations: A Pyrotechnic Approach
11. Neurolinguistic Shoes
12. The Power/Purpose, Prose/Poetry Plexus: Where do you stand?

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Correction

"Designing a Dual-Career Marriage Seminar," on page 87 of the October 1984 issue was written by Richard P. Long and Kathleen M. Long.