



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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The Do's of Training

Training concepts that are nearly always successful

Progeon Ltd, a Bangalore based business process outsourcing organization won 2005 *Optimas Award for Vision*. This award is conferred on organizations conducting excellent training programs especially those that succeed in forecasting and addressing future business needs. In the fast growing BPO industry, the award in itself is an achievement.

Training with a golden spoon

Progeon's training efforts do not end with winning awards. The organization recorded a year-to-date turnover of 38 percent; this, when the BPO industry is reeling under high attrition rates. A recent study by the National Association of Software and Service Companies reveals that attrition rates are as high as 50 percent in voice-based areas and nearly 20 percent in data based areas.

Another significant training benefit that Progeon enjoys is an increase in internal promotions. Thanks to their excellent voice-training sessions, two-thirds of Progeon's supervisors handling voice-based transactions with its biggest banking client were promoted internally saving on huge orientation and hiring costs. "It's been much less costly to cultivate people from within", says Nandita Gurgar, the company's head of Human Resources.

Offering growth prospects through training

Training has helped Progeon create growth opportunities for its employees within the organization itself. This is why it attracts high caliber candidates. Nearly 90 percent of its ambitious new hires hold university degrees. Internal growth prospects also make it easy for the organization to hire well. This year Progeon hired nearly 1000 employees more than the year before.

What is good about Progeon's training?

With more than a dozen of languages widely spoken across India, the English accent of their new hires varies significantly. Grammar is another area that requires attention. Progeon has 22 major international clients ranging from the financial services, banking and the telecommunications sector.

The organization has to train its employees to handle overdraft notifications, faulty telephones, mortgage information and general queries. All this, without letting their callers know that they have been routed to another continent!

Progeon's training officials have developed a boot camp that focuses on voice coaching besides addressing other equally important requirements- cross-cultural instructions, industry and sales training. The boot camp lasts only a few weeks for those employees who handle transactions via e-mail. However, for employees who answer telephone calls and more sophisticated transactions, the boot camp lasts nearly eight weeks.



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During the first six weeks, new hires spend two hours a day neutralising their accents. Each employee records his voice and analyses the tapes to identify where he falters and to the quantum and nature of improvement required. Those with strong regional accents are given extra tips. "Don't speak too fast. Make sure the words are clearer", says Nandini Nathan, Progeon's senior manager for organizational development.

Training power

Besides voice coaching, the training includes educating employees about their future clients. For instance, if an employee is assigned to the financial services department he is made aware of the client's history, jargon, and the latest happenings in the industry including the scandals. Such information helps build better employee-client rapport and makes the training sessions more interesting.

Another important issue that training handles is the cultural differences. A caller can handle overseas clients better if he understands cross-cultural issues. For instance, an Indian would probably hesitate to deliver bad news to a person in a direct manner lest it should offend him. However, an American might believe in the direct approach. He would consider something amiss if bad news were not delivered straightaway! Such incidents can affect a BPO's quantum and quality of clientele. Cross-cultural instructions help avoid such situations as the employee is trained to understand client requirements better.

What else can make training work?

According to Barry Shier, CEO of Beau Rivage, a highly successful resort, it is "growth" in any training program that makes training work. It is important that a training program identifies and segregates ambitious employees from others. Beau Rivage's training program puts these ambitious employees through a range of classes, from conflict resolution to team building, and entrepreneurial perception to motivation.

Training with the growth angle

On completing these classes, each employee is interviewed and his interest in the organization and interpersonal skills evaluated. The employees are then ranked for promotional opportunities and the areas where they need to be further trained. The top rank holders move on to growth level two- a mentor program.

A top senior manager is then assigned to each line of employees. These managers act as mentors helping employees develop relationships outside their departments. By the end of level two, an employee learns to appreciate and anticipate client requirements based on his business perspective and knowledge.

Employees who develop a keen understanding of other people's insights are promoted to areas of higher-level development skills such as damage control, public speaking and writing skills. Has Beau Rivage's training program succeeded in achieving intended results? Yes, and as Shier says, "You can see it in employee retention and customer feedback".



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More to successful training

Is successful training only about offering growth prospects? According to Bill Austin and other leading HR professionals, the growth angle apart, successful training involves what employees really like without diluting the organization's training requirements. Health Partners' training program has been a huge success. The training department owes this success to their programs, which cater to employee needs.

The 'wish - well'

Employees would like to have

- *A flexible program that caters to different learning styles:* Not all employees are quick learners; some might require more practice. A training session that offers multiple sessions allowing learners the freedom to repeat sessions as and when the need arises works well.
- *A short program conveniently timed:* Research proves that employees learn and retain better if information is given to them in small, manageable bite sized chunks. Busy employees too gain from such sessions. Such sessions are short, so they do not interfere with employees' work schedules. Moreover, participation is better when training sessions are short.
- *A program that places minimum emphasis on quantifying training success:* Any over-emphasis on using some form of measurement to determine training success intimidates most learners. Instead of spending time and resources quantifying training success, Austin prefers talking to employees about their improved competencies and skills post-training. He says, "Time and expense can be more productively applied to develop new courses to meet next months' challenge".
- *A program that does not pressurize learners:* Training experts believe that if employees are constantly worried about their course performance it will either deter them from enrolling or help them distracted from their work. A training program that is non-competitive supportive and includes discussions where employees can talk about training and work related anxieties is a great hit with learners.

Whether it is about anticipating and addressing future business needs or including growth prospects or about catering to learner likes and dislikes training programs must cater to each requirement in order to be successful.