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Haute Couture!

Training made fashionable

With a new resolve to give training that extra mileage, let's first go over some common training mistakes. This is important because statistics reveal that most trainers and training departments make the same glaring mistakes - repeatedly!

Some trainers now believe that building effective training programs and reference material is like putting together a good wardrobe! A good collection of clothes and accessories can cater to:

- Different weather conditions
- Activities and situations
- Changing public tastes

Similarly, a good collection of training programs and material should cater to:

- Different departmental and organizational needs
- A variety of tasks
- Learning styles
- Changes in organizational objectives

Getting back to listing common training mistakes, it comes as a surprise to some trainers to learn that despite all their efforts, there are a few training blunders that still feature on their lists.

The size problem

Free size programs

Based on the one-size-fits-all theory, some free sized training programs attempt to be all-inclusive and cover a variety of topics. For instance, an assembly line worker needs to know different product details than the sales person. To make training more focused, relevant and targeted, free size programs should be cut and tailored to match audience and organizational training needs.

Ill-fitting programs

Some training programs need only a little bit of tweaking to suit training needs, just like clothes that fit well after minor alterations. A thorough audience analysis helps organizations make those nips and tucks to enhance training impact. Some training departments give their subject matter experts (SME) free rein. SMEs often flaunt their knowledge. Proper guidance helps SMEs align course content to audience and training requirements.

A little too tight!



TenStep Supplemental Paper

In their enthusiasm to complete too many training workshops, some trainers run through certain essential topics. Tight training schedules, like tight clothes, allow little flexibility and breathing space! For example, safety training is essential for assembly line workers in an electronics company. Covering safety training in a one hour PowerPoint presentation will leave the trainee as ignorant as he or she was before. A certification course would be ideal in this case.

Setting it right

Corrective measures for the 'fit' problem involves tailored training programs of the correct size with little or no alterations. Keeping a few aspects in mind will help develop training programs to fit organizational needs.

Organizational goals: If training programs are brought in to improve performance or correct certain behaviors, make sure that they do so. Training shouldn't be allowed to deviate from the organizational goals; in fact, it should emphasize and address the goals all along.

Audience: It is important to keep learners' profiles in mind when designing training programs. For instance, an organization has to train its administrative staff and shop floor workers in a particular topic. For the former, training should include guidelines and procedures they can apply in their job. For the latter, training should blend step-by-step, clear instructions and practical sessions.

Source: The need to train originates from a task or a department. For instance, it is the marketing managers' idea to develop a training program for his sales people. The trainer should then make sure that the managers' requirements are addressed when creating the program or compiling content.

Support system: Training becomes more meaningful when it is part of the bigger organizational picture. Therefore, using supportive incentives (carrots) and disincentives (sticks) to drive training needs enhances its impact.

Administration: This involves the use of feedback systems, assessments, pre and post training tests, remedial programs, tracking and scheduling devices, etc. Smooth functioning of any training initiative depends on these administrative tools.

Content mistakes

Old patterns

Fashion changes with time. What was once considered 'hip' will become outdated. The same holds true for course content. Content that is affected by policies or legal and regulatory procedures, and application-based training are often carried forward without the needed changes. For instance, many organizations have application manuals that no longer match their system.

Dusty, musty!



TenStep Supplemental Paper

Every training department needs to be cleaned regularly! Courseware and manuals that are only collecting dust should be discarded. All they do is eat into storage space and maintenance budgets, in much the same way as clothes that haven't been worn in years.

Free-flowing!

Instructional designers compete to write bigger books and add colorful tabs where a quick reference card would suffice! As a result organizations end up with large manuals with high reproduction costs that serve as decoration! While full-colored pages and laminated tabs improve visual appeal, training, unlike fashion, is not about looks alone. Organizations have to consider the cost versus returns on investment. This is much like buying clothing that lasts several seasons instead of expensive one-season fad garments.

Solving the content issue

Topical training is an ideal solution to set training content right. An analysis of usage percentages, class attendance, evaluations and test results gives a clear idea of courseware effectiveness. In addition, conducting surveys and interviewing managers helps assess the value addition of training. Training content should be closely matched to organizational goals and legal requirements. Creating topical training is a simple three-step process: schedule reviews, review content and update it.

Overkill

Too big!

It's like attending the CEO conference in a bridal gown! One reason trainers overdress or spend too many days on a topic when only a few hours would suffice is because training success is often measured in terms of the hours spent in training. This overkill, besides having minimal impact, fuels the notion that training is a waste of time.

Haute couture!

Fashion fads might be tempting, but they have a short life span. Training programs that have been designed along traditional lines will continue to remain effective.

Killing the overkill!

Targeted training is what solves the overkill problem. Tailored, topical and targeted- are evolving as the three T's of training success.