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I find the topic of training an interesting topic for most organizations. Many see it as the "magic pill fix" for any issue – when, in fact, it is only useful in specific applications. The key question is how you determine those applications.

My rule of thumb is if employees are under performing, ask yourself this question (hypothetically): If I threatened their life, could they perform? If the answer is yes, it's not a training problem because they know what to do, they are just not doing it. So the problem must lie elsewhere – motivation unclear goal setting, etc.

Having said all that, if training is the issue, the following are some guidelines to ensure success for your training investment...

An article in USA Today stated that billions of dollars were wasted on job skills training. How much money did your organization spend on training last year that failed to provide you with the results you sought?

How to avoid common employee training pitfalls

From industry experience, there are some common factors that have been noted among successful learning organizations and companies where training does not make an impact. Here are a few reasons why companies fail at training:

1. **No needs assessment.** A doctor who prescribes medicine without seeing a patient is guilty of malpractice. Yet, so many companies hire vendors to provide training without first analyzing the needs of the organization, department, or the individual. This is a waste of training dollars. Do not proceed to training until you assess the needs.
2. **Training is always the answer.** Have a problem? Quick! Find a training program. One of the biggest myths is that training can fix everything. Managers must first assess if the problem is a training issue or an organizational problem. If employees are failing in some aspect of their job, determine whether you have provided them with the time and tools needed to perform the job. Do they clearly understand what is expected of them?
3. **Training is reactive.** Training must support the business objectives if it is to have impact. True learning organizations build training into the strategic plan. What is the company mission and where are the skill gaps? Training must be integrated, holistic, and part of long term planning if it is to make a difference. The impact of the training can be enhanced even further if the employees see the link between the training and their ability to contribute to the accomplishment of the organization's business plan and goals. Training is an investment in the business – not an expense.
4. **Training is a one-shot deal.** Some companies believe that you can send someone to a two-day program and they will be changed like magic. Sorry. There are no magic wands. Training must be reinforced. Classes must build on each other and reinforce the content learned in earlier sessions. Too many organizations approach training as a potpourri or menu of available classes and sessions.

5. **Training seminars produce optimum learning.** People learn more in training sessions that provide chunks, small amounts of content, based on a couple of well-defined objectives. This allows for practice of the concepts in between the sessions or through case studies. Content and application of concepts are reinforced. This also allows people to discuss their successes and difficulties in applying the training in their actual work session. The instructor can help participants practice the training content by giving assignments that are debriefed at future sessions.
6. **No application of new skills.** "Use it or lose it," is a common refrain about training. This is a true statement. Even with strategic skills such as listening, providing performance feedback, and team building, set up situations in which practice is immediate and frequent, to help participants retain the training.
7. **Lack of ownership.** Make it clear that the employees are fully responsible for the training and they need to take the training seriously. They are expected to apply themselves to the training process before, during, and after the session. This includes completing pre-training assignments, actively participating in the session, and applying new ideas and skills upon returning to work.
8. **Management does not participate.** Full support and high accountability by upper management is essential for application success. Successful learning organizations support training at the most senior levels. Without support, morale decreases and training has little or no impact. Support is evidenced in several ways. Employees are required to complete many hours of training per year with real, on the job goal achievement in mind. Training is built into the performance appraisal and is reinforced back on the job by the manager.

Now that you are aware of several of the possible pitfalls that can work against your training efforts, let P Squared help you customize employee development programs that work and return the maximum benefit for the investment of your training dollars!

One P Squared client recently observed...

"I realize now that our company has just been training our people – not developing them. We have a one-size fits all type of training and that is not necessarily effective for all. The P Squared training does all that and is adaptable."

Excerpts taken from HR.com