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All successful organizations invest in the training of their people. But quite often, executives become frustrated with the lack of results they see or perceive from the training they pay for so they opt to skip or reduce it. However, rather than doing away with or reducing training, managers should seek out training programs that adhere to processes that work.

Truly, you must train people if you want your organization to be outstanding. That does not mean, however, that you should just do *any* training--and you certainly shouldn't implement *poor* training. In defense of the executives who are reluctant to fund training, they've seen a lot of lousy programs because there's a ton of junk on the training market. However, training that pays off can be acquired --or developed--if you know what to look for. A training process that works meets the following seven key criteria:

1) *Practical Content.* Excellent content is practical content--and content is only practical when it helps people know *what* to do (concepts and principles), *how* to do it (techniques and methods), and *why* they should do it that way (purposes and reasons). Training can be deemed practical when participants can actually use it--that it will elicit action and behavioral change. That, of course, is precisely the purpose of training in the first place.

2) *Repetition.* The motor of learning is repetition. If there is no way to repeat the training, then most likely it will fail or not be effective. One exposure isn't enough. People need repetition in order to successfully navigate the four stages of learning.

When someone is first exposed to a new idea, they become *aware* of it; they learn that it exists. Then, as they try it, they feel *awkward*--and this is where most people quit trying. Gradually, though, if they keep applying the idea, they attain a level of *comfort*, which is progress but not the ultimate goal. The pinnacle of learning is when someone achieves *reflex action*. That's when the content has become so much a part of the person that it's instinctively applied --it becomes a real skill.

3) *Ownership by Management.* Although staff trainers or training departments are a valuable resource, in the end, it's the manager's job to train and develop people. In fact, when managers are actively involved in the training process, they are better able to coach the content later on--and it sets the right example, too.

4) *Consistent Message.* The messages we send through training must be consistent over time and across all those trained. If different groups of participants hear different messages, confusion is the result, and confusion prevents action. Since this is the exact opposite of what training should do, the lack of consistency of message can be a big problem, especially for organizations that train hundreds or thousands of people. Make sure the training you invest in conveys the same core message over and over again for all to hear.

5) *Easily Customized.* Customization is important but highly misunderstood--and often a big waste of money. Customized training is not about having an organization's name embossed on the training tools, or having role-playing actors on a DVD or the Web talking about specific products or services.

It's all about *connection*--between the content and the problems.

Here's the formula for customizing training: *Problems + Practical Content + Conversation = Customization.*

Connecting practical material to the problems, language, and culture of the organization, and giving learners ample time to explore it all through well-facilitated dialogue, results in wonderfully tailored training.

6) *Support Tools.* Every training program will have different types of tools, but one thing is for certain: Less is more. Participants shouldn't be burdened with so many “take-aways” that the materials never get touched outside the classroom. If there's simply too much material or it is not practical, it'll wind up in the bottom of a drawer, lost among folders and papers.

7) *Specific Plan.* Like anything that is done well, training needs to follow a plan. An effective training program lays out a road map to ensure that each step fits the culture, pace of work, and logistical issues of the organization--not to mention people's developmental needs. Without a plan, the training program becomes just a shot in the arm with little long-term impact.

So think about these seven criteria when exploring options for training. Lots of organizations espouse “people are our greatest asset,” but only the outstanding ones support those words with adequate training. Train people appropriately and boost your organization's true potential and capability. And remember, if you're not effectively training, somebody else is. And if they happen to be your competition, you're in trouble.

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