

HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT



Training – You Have to Walk the Walk

By Dr. Rick Johnson

Most company executives decide to spend money on training because it is popular, especially when economic times are good. There is a view that it is “good” and it is also something that responsible leaders are “supposed to do” to prepare for the future. However, just spending money on training isn’t the only answer. Training alone will not produce the kind of results that training combined with coaching and mentoring can produce.

Training can increase specific skill sets but education, coaching and mentoring is necessary for complete employee development which incorporates leadership into the equation.

When Times Get Tough

Unfortunately, training becomes the first activity to be cut when times get tough. There is also no clear cut objective measure that calculates the business case for Return on Investment (ROI) for training.

Continued Investment in Training Activities Should Take into Consideration:

- How the employee learned how to do their job? Was it in a seminar?
- What role did formal company sponsored training play in the development of the best people currently employed?
- What measures exist to identify current employee effectiveness? How do you measure improvement and contributions to profitability?
- There are many ways to change behavior and training is one of the least effective. High impact change strategies start with direct manager coaching, counseling and mentoring.

Regular performance appraisals, changes in incentive or pay practices, changes in work flow processes and information system tools are often necessary to support the coaching and mentoring process.

- How does the proposed training investment fit into the organization’s overall change strategy? Is there even a clear strategy in existence?

Training --- The Official Definition:

Limiting the behavioral responses to a given stimulus, while development is intended to increase behavioral alternatives to the same stimulus

As an example, employees need to be trained to enter an order because there is a “right way” to do it. Sales people need to be developed to increase their effectiveness in customer situations. The desired behavior is clear and compliance measures are relatively easy to ascertain. Development is much more esoteric if a real return on investment is desired.

Development requires coaching and mentoring.

Walking the Walk

When individual companies choose to make the investment and develop proprietary training programs, a different approach may be necessary to meet desired objectives. In simple terms this approach includes:

1. An assessment of the training population (employees) in question from both peer comparisons and within the distribution segment that the company competes. This normally results in some staffing changes, i.e. “let’s get rid of the habitual non-performers first”.
2. Development of an explicit and company specific “Best Practices” model that defines individual behaviors, management practices, and the information tools necessary to accomplish the work. This usually results in some formal definition of work flow processes and formal tools to do the work and measure success, i.e. “a formal scorecard for sales people”
3. Support and commitment on the part of the management group to create this company success model. This usually results in new computer reports, information tools, as well as policy and procedure changes.
4. Company managers should be certified in the process to provide ongoing support with new people. Coaching and mentoring classes should be completed by all managers to support the training process. Employees are taught how to use the new tools and measurement systems with the full involvement of their immediate supervisor. Post training coaching and reinforcement is the number one criteria to insure behavioral change.

Many companies will chose to buy seminars where the main concern is the speaker, and audience entertainment style evaluations, i.e. “This was the best seminar that I ever attended”. While managers get a “feel good” there are other alternatives for those who believe that employee performance is a basis for competitive advantage. Seminars are not designed for behavior modification. They must be supported by follow-up training, coaching and mentoring dependent upon individual employee circumstance.

Training is designed to improve specific skills. Education is designed to teach knowledge. It is important to know when to train and when to educate. Timing is important...

When Should I Train and When Should I Educate?

Leadership carries a responsibility to release the greatness in others. The ability to recognize potential in others is important in determining the type of support an employee may need. Training is the easy part because most training is job specific. However, internships are often initiated by progressive companies for high potential employees. Internships should include training, education and coaching and mentoring. Training should be given to all employees to improve specific job performance. But, if you are going to build bench strength and create effective succession planning, training, education and coaching and mentoring combined are the prerequisites for success.

Training alone can be effective when;

- New skills are required due to job requirement changes
- Performance levels are not acceptable
- Task related issues are identified
- New employees are hired

Education can be effective when;

- Employees seek additional responsibility
- Employees seek more challenge
- Employees demonstrate potential for future development
- Needs for bench strength and leadership voids are identified

Authors Note: *Education and training can always be beneficial under almost any circumstances. The intent of this article is to encourage not discourage more education and training. However, realistically, every company has a budget. As a result, it is helpful to identify specific needs for training and education to maximize the return on investment dollars.*

Whether the company is providing training, education or both, the success ratio and return on that investment can be increased exponentially if they are supported by a coaching and mentoring process.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Eric "Rick" Johnson is the founder of CEO Strategist LLC., an experienced based firm specialising in Distribution. CEO Strategist LLC. works in an advisory capacity with distributor executives in board representation, executive coaching, team coaching and education and training to make the changes necessary to create or maintain competitive advantage.

As a veteran of the **wholesale distribution industry** with more than 30 years of executive management experience, **Rick Johnson** knows exactly what it takes to create leaders within a company, and how to maximise every sale to its full potential.

Through his on-site speaking engagements he can educate and train your team to succeed. As an executive coach he'll help you develop the skills you need to take your business to the next level. And he'll work closely with you and your leadership team for maximum results in the shortest time possible.

Dr. Rick Johnson knows a little about success. Starting out on the ground floor, Rick spent the first 10 years of his career employed by the largest steel distributor in the world. Then challenging himself to take what he had learned and forge a venture of his own, he built a \$25 million wholesale distribution business in less than 10 years (before earning a college education!). Deciding to succeed on the industrial front lines and in the classroom, Rick went after his bachelor's degree at 40, his MBA at 50, and his Ph.D. in Business Strategy at 58.

After selling his business, he decided to share his success secrets by taking the helm of troubled businesses as a "turnaround" expert. He helped set new directions for companies with revenue from \$50 to \$400 million, leading them from loss to profit. More recently, Rick has brought his expertise to the business consultant arena, where he utilises his unique formulas for making businesses profitable.

With his significant real-world experience and impressive academic credentials, today Rick travels the United States speaking to CEOs, business leaders, and employees about how to increase their bottom line. His down-to-earth presentations of key business principles help companies succeed as total solution providers. His keynote speeches and popular workshops focus on strategic leadership, sales effectiveness and the power of unlocking employee potential, all the while imparting rubber-meets-the-road leadership skills 35 years in business have taught him.

Rick has become the "go to" guy for maximising profits because he's been there, done it all, from the mailroom to the boardroom, and has the experience and the knowledge to prove it.

Check out Rick's CD and Workbook -- Real World Leadership Kit --- "Learning to Lead So Others Will Follow"
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