

Training Forum

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TRAINING TIP

Clearly explain why the training topic is important to learners and how it is relevant to their daily jobs. Learners will be more likely to remember the concepts taught if they understand how those concepts specifically apply to them.

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Five Keys to Corporate University Success

Benchmarking against other corporate universities provides useful insight into what's working—and what's not—in training.

In a recent study, Best Practices[®], LLC's Business Excellence Board (www.best-in-class.com) found that leading corporate universities link business needs to core competencies and provide competency-based training online and in the classroom. "Corporate University Excellence: Creating a Robust and Flexible Workforce," a white paper on the study, reports that best-in-class corporate universities leverage technology by making virtual online instruction available to their employees 24/7 and that they use classroom training for soft skills coaching and leadership development, which require interactivity.

The study identified other common traits of successful corporate universities. For example, they provide training that is enriching to both the company and the employee, and they "organize and control a complex education agenda in a way that ensures that business unit needs are met and companywide values

are instilled throughout the organization," the research and advisory services firm writes.

In addition, "best-in-class corporate universities know that the best teachers are front-line managers and executives who combine real-world expertise with academics," according to the report.

Five best practices for corporate universities also emerged from this study. First, "match the form of learning to the function of learning to achieve the right blend of virtual and classroom approaches," Best Practices, LLC, writes. "... Finding the right blend of learning opportunities is essential to addressing all training needs."

Leading corporate universities also employ various learning tools and measure their success, according to the firm.

Second, "to develop competencies and curriculum, training departments should work as a consultant to the business units to meet each department's needs but still work to achieve companywide

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CASE STUDY

Terminated Worker Alleges Gender Stereotyping

When training supervisors, make sure they understand that termination decisions must be based on legitimate, nondiscriminatory reasons, and that gender stereotyping can create legal problems.

What Happened

Lorraine Lettieri worked for Global One and its successor, Equant, Inc., from 1989 until July 2002. Both provided international data and voice telecommunications services. Equant acquired Global One in July 2001, and the two companies merged.

Before the merger, Lettieri was director of Alternate Sales Channel. During premerger talks, Equant decided to reorganize the sales employees that Lettieri supervised into a new unit that would be supervised by a person appointed to a newly created position.

Equant Senior Vice President Sean Parkinson interviewed Lettieri for the position, asking her questions about her personal life, such as whether she had children, what types of child care responsibilities she had, and how her

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Ask the Trainer

Q Why are self-discovery and reflection so important in the learning process, and what can trainers do to promote them during training?

A Self-discovery and reflection create “intrinsic inspiration to learn more,” says Michelle LaBrosse, CEO of Cheetah Learning (www.cheetahlearning.com).

“It isn’t just asking people to reflect on what they just experienced that will drive self-discovery and reflection in training,” she says. Trainers need to set up “meaningful simulations where the students can progress through the material in a way that is intuitive and will drive the ‘aha’ moments for them that are unique and personal to them.”

“There is not one magic bullet to creating great courses that stimulate self-discovery and reflection,” LaBrosse says. “The way the course is designed is highly dependent on the type of skill and the level of mastery the student wants or needs to achieve.”

“Intuitively, people go through four levels of learning,” she says. The first level is **awareness**. “Upon reflection

of their past successes and failures, they realize that there is a lot more for them to learn; they recognize the potential and develop the desire to learn more.”

The second level is **knowledge**. “When they develop that desire, “they pursue a knowledge acquisition phase,” LaBrosse says. “This is typically characterized by reading books, attending lectures, and taking tests to demonstrate they have acquired the level of knowledge for a specific area.”

Skill is the third level of **learning**. “At the skill stage, people are learning how to apply what they know to achieve useful results,” she says.

The fourth level, **mastery**, “is the level that is guided the most by self-discovery and reflection.” At this level, people are “truly in charge of how well they can use their skills to consistently achieve their desired results.”

Noting that “most corporate training focuses at the ‘awareness level’ where the trainer flips through a deck of PowerPoint® slides [and] ... may have one or two disjointed activities,” LaBrosse says, “trainers need to become much more conscious of what level of learning they are attempting to have their students achieve.”

Trainer’s Corner

Don’t Let Training Get Sidelined

You’ve identified training needs within your organization, set realistic goals, and determined which type of training each employee needs. No small task, but your work isn’t done yet. Without careful planning, day-to-day demands on your time—and that of learners in your organization—might prevent training from actually taking place. That’s why it’s so important to set up a reasonable, realistic training schedule.

Here are a few tips to help ensure that training doesn’t get sidelined because of competing priorities:

- Create a master schedule of all the training you want to conduct for the next 6 months to a year.
- Set specific dates for each training session within your master schedule. Or, if you’re using online training or some other form of self-directed training such as audio PowerPoint® sessions that employees can complete on their own, set specific dates by which training must be completed.
- Include makeup dates for trainees who cannot attend scheduled group sessions.
- Use a logical progression for multipart training. Make sure sessions aren’t so far apart that trainees forget the first training or too close together that trainees suffer information overload.

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family felt about her weekly commute from their home in New York to Equant's Reston, Virginia, headquarters. Specifically, Parkinson asked "how [her] husband handled the fact that [she] was away from home so much, not caring for the family."

After the interview, Lettieri expressed concern to her supervisor, Jim Hamrick, about Parkinson's gender stereotyping and about his focus on her personal life instead of her professional qualifications.

Parkinson notified Lettieri in early July 2001 that a male Equant employee, Michael Taylor, had been selected for the new position, mainly because his children were grown, and he and his wife could move to Reston. Lettieri complained to HR about Parkinson's sexist assumptions and attitude.

Taylor suggested repeatedly that Lettieri consider transferring to Equant's New York office to be closer to her family. In mid-December 2001, he proposed reducing her supervisory responsibilities and reassigning her to New York.

Lettieri complained to HR about the discriminatory nature of Taylor's plan and her interview with Parkinson. She also reported a "major problem [with the] way women are perceived" at Equant and that the "management structure is biased against women."

HR notified Taylor and Parkinson about the complaints. Taylor agreed not to implement his proposal, but weeks later, he announced that he would assume many of Lettieri's responsibilities.

Parkinson and Taylor discussed terminating Lettieri to reduce costs. When Parkinson was replaced by Paul Radochia, Taylor approached Radochia about terminating the positions of Lettieri and another female middle manager. Taylor later recommended that a recently demoted male employee be promoted to replace Lettieri.

Noting that Avino was a "poor performer," Radochia said that Lettieri could not be replaced for 6 months anyway, and that Taylor was supposed to assume her responsibilities. Taylor agreed to follow the original plan.

Just before an HR representative fired Lettieri in a July 8, 2002, meeting, Taylor said to Lettieri, "My, don't you look pretty in pink."

When Barbara Wellons joined Equant in February 2003, she assumed Taylor's upper-level management responsibilities, effectively demoting him to Lettieri's former position. At Wellons' request, Taylor resigned 2 months later, and Wellons hired Gregroy DeMarco to fill the vacancy.

Lettieri filed sex discrimination and retaliation charges with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and then filed suit against Equant, alleging sex discrimination and retaliation under Title VII of the Civil Rights

Act, as well as breach of contract for what she claimed \$50,000 in unpaid sales commissions.

A district court ruled in favor of Equant, and Lettieri appealed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 4th Circuit, which covers Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia.

What the Court Said

The appeals court reversed the district's court's decision regarding the Title VII claims and affirmed the breach of contract claim.

Although Equant maintained that Lettieri's position was "not really needed," and it terminated her to save money, Taylor immediately recommended promoting a previously demoted male employee to succeed Lettieri—until his efforts were thwarted by Radochia, the court noted.

Lettieri's former position "re-emerged" as a separate position in February 2003 when Wellons assumed Taylor's upper-level management responsibilities and Taylor continued in Lettieri's former role. When Taylor resigned, DeMarco was hired to fill the position.

In addition, "[t]here is powerful evidence showing a discriminatory attitude at Equant toward female managers—particularly female managers who have children at home and commute long distances," the court said, noting Parkinson's comments during the interview for the newly created position and Taylor's repeated suggestions that Lettieri return to New York to be with her family. The court also noted that within weeks of her sex discrimination complaints, Lettieri's job responsibilities were reduced and termination talks began.

The court said the reduction in responsibilities "made it easier for Taylor to take the position later that Lettieri was not needed and should be terminated."

Lettieri v. Equant Incorporated (No. 05-1532) (U.S. Court of Appeals, 4th Cir., 3/5/07)

CASE STUDY

In Brief

Avoid gender stereotyping. Through training, help supervisors understand how sexist comments may prompt charges of discrimination.

Make objective personnel decisions. Decisions to hire, promote, demote, or terminate should be based on legitimate, nondiscriminatory reasons—not, as in this case, on a supervisor's assumptions about whether a female worker can adequately balance her work and personal lives.

Communicate openly. Require supervisors to contact HR to discuss plans to terminate, promote, or demote employees.

Best PRACTICES IN TRAINING

Promote Diversity ‘Early and Often’ Among Employees

Arnold & Porter LLP doesn't waste any time letting new hires know that it is committed to creating a diverse, inclusive environment. In fact, the law firm addresses diversity during orientation and then requires that all new hires complete a half-day diversity training session.

“We start with orientation, because I think that's where you need to emphasize it,” says Elizabeth Respass, director of Human Resources.

“I think it's important to talk about diversity and to promote it early and often,” she says. “We meet with each incoming person to talk about the things that are important to the organization.... By defining those things up front, it helps reinforce them.”

Training Fosters Appreciation

Arnold & Porter (www.arnoldporter.com) implemented its mandatory diversity training program for all new hires about 8 years ago. The classroom-based session, which is taught by an outside consultant, helps foster an appreciation for and understanding of diversity, Respass explains. “What we try to instill in people is that everyone comes to the organization with a different background.”

During introductions, participants are asked to share something unique about themselves. “By the end of the introductions, the room is just a more comfortable place to be,” she says. “That's because this exercise helps employees realize that each person has unique characteristics that are important to him or her.”

The session is interactive, featuring a combination of approaches, including videos, role-playing, discussion, and lecture, she says. Participants discuss diversity, discrimination, and how people are affected when they feel that they are “not accepted for who they are.”

New attorneys and supervisors also complete a 2- to 3-hour sexual harassment and nondiscrimination training session within 6 months of their arrival at the firm. This class, taught by an outside employment attorney, focuses on legal requirements and a review of the firm's internal

policies. “In some cases, we go beyond what the law requires,” Respass says. In addition, this session addresses nonretaliation and how to report a potential problem.

“It involves all aspects of the workplace,” Respass says, referring to interactions with co-workers, vendors, and clients.

Last year, Arnold & Porter also launched diversity leadership training for nearly 20 partners and executive-level employees, who initially met in small groups and then selected individual diversity projects to pursue. “Each person is charged with coming up with a project that promotes diversity within their realm of influence,” she explains. For example, Respass chose to pursue a community services program to promote interaction among employees and the community.

Another employee implemented a companywide monthly diversity awareness program aimed at fostering an appreciation of different cultures and identities, says Respass.

Arnold & Porter's diversity training and diversity committee were recognized this year when the firm was named one of five organizations to receive a Great Place to Work Award.

Tips to Consider

Respass offers some advice for employers who want to strengthen their diversity training efforts. First, management buy-in is critical to the success of your training program. “You've got to have support from the top,” she says.

In addition, diversity must be a priority. “You as an organization have to decide what is important to you and make a commitment to it,” she says.

She also recommends providing diversity training to all employees and including employees at different levels of the organization in the same training sessions.

Finally, look for continual improvement, and tweak the training program as necessary.

Five Keys ... (cont. from page 1)

standardization,” the white paper states. “Best-in-class companies coordinate the training needs of each business unit to ensure that best practices are shared and corporate values are instilled companywide.”

Third, “when developing a corporate university or instituting major changes, get buy-in early throughout the company to ensure that the overall mission is supported and executed,” the report states.

Fourth, “involve senior managers in training to offer employees real-world perspectives,” the firm writes.

“Top companies either encourage or require senior managers to lead, facilitate, or serve as guest speakers for employee training and development.”

Finally, “find a way to demonstrate value and return on investment to keep training relevant and effective,” the white paper states. “Best-in-class companies monitor their return on investment to ensure that successful programs are emulated and to best identify areas to cut when budgets are tight.”