

Business Training: The Key to Project and Long-Term Success

No one can control the economy, the balance of trade or the fluctuations in the yen versus the dollar, but you can deploy effective business training for your organization that can increase your chance for success in the long term. Business training emphasizing the basics in market, customer or industry knowledge and product information can be used to leverage success on a small or project scale, which can lead to big returns in the aggregate. Also, the rather simple idea of getting everyone on the same page and working toward a common goal is not to be underestimated.

“Have a group of people focused on a common purpose and get them aligned effectively so that there isn’t distraction and there isn’t conflict with things going on within the company, or what I call ‘the greater company’: my customers, vendors, investors, staff, contractors, etc.,” said David Meyer, president, Training4Business. “If there’s harmony in that set of people, there tends to be much better leverage, and I get much better results.”

People are happier on their jobs when they are productively working with a group toward a common goal, and with the right training, Meyer said that a corresponding rise in customer satisfaction is very common. “Why are we here? To deliver a product to a customer who’s supposed to get more value than what he pays. We should get more money than it costs, and that makes a synergistic business opportunity for everybody,” Meyer said. “If we focus on teaching people how to make what they’re supposed to make, whether they are an accounts payable clerk, a production person, a receptionist or even a vice president, they’re going to get better at their job. If they understand policies and procedures and how the group works together, they’re going to be more harmonious with the group. If they understand their public, their customers and what their needs and wants are and how to interact with them better, they’ll sell more and have happier customers who tend to refer more, and that’s what we’re after—prospering and growing.”

To impart that kind of learning, organizations must invest funds and attention in business training, and the best starting point is a small one, which reduces risk and, if successful, allows you to show some benefit and return on investment. Also, it’s easier to get a smaller project audience to buy into training. “Nobody likes to be told they don’t know, and nobody likes being made to look stupid,” Meyer said. “So my general strategy is to find a fairly big win quickly so that the emotion and the incentive of the people involved is in alignment with doing the training. Sometimes it’s real obvious. Sometimes you just have to find out what’s most palatable and take the easiest chink in the armor, an initial win so that you can tackle the rest of it.”

Taylor Guitars Inc. spent three years improving the general business knowledge of each person on its manufacturing floor relative to their jobs and the jobs of their customers and vendors. As a result Taylor employees understand the people they serve better, and their ability to respond to change has increased dramatically by promoting a common understanding throughout the production process, said Meyer. “It’s quite dramatic. They released a brand-new product from concept to actual delivery in less than four months. Normally it takes like a year. They’re going to step up production from essentially zero to meet the market demand to a really high pace relative to their business, and that will take less than 60 days because they all got together and said, ‘What do we need? How are we going to do it? Who’s going to do what? Where are we going to get the people?’ The understanding amongst the people in the room who have to make decisions is high, and they appreciate each other’s issues rather than sitting there defending turf.”

Business training also can be used to weed out potentially difficult employee candidates before they go on the company payroll or take advantage of a trial employment period to cause trouble. “People who are not desirable employees also tend to have problems studying and learning,” Meyer said. “When you drive them through a rigorous training process immediately on hire, you tend to lose the deadwood early in the game.”

“The fundamental thing is to be doing something, making progress, because there can be barriers to the training process,” Meyer said. “You have to find the thing that you can do next so that you’re making inroads. If you pick the right thing, then you’ll have a little success, and you can build on that. With the tools that are available today, there’s no reason why you shouldn’t be successful on some level at something. The dollar you invest today versus saving \$10 six months from now, five years from now that \$10 could be \$1,000 in leveraged money because of productivity, profitability, new markets, new customers, better employee capabilities and things like that.”