Personnel Notes

Employee Training & Development by Dorice Regan

It would be unrealistic to hope that all of the employees hired by a company would possess the knowledge, background and skills to perform every function of their job. There is always something new that an employee can learn to improve his/her performance. This is where the human resources function of employee training and development comes into play.

Designing a training and development program involves a number of steps including needs assessment, instructional objectives, design, implementation and evaluation. Before any training actually occurs, the who, what, when, where, why and how must be determined. The training manager, or whomever is designated as the company trainer, must gather and analyze information such as the organization's goals and objectives; jobs and related tasks that need to be learned; skills and competencies that are needed to perform the job; and the individuals who are to be trained.

The first step in designing a training and development program is to conduct a needs assessment. The three levels of needs assessment are organizational analysis, task analysis and individual analysis.

ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS

Organizational analysis examines the effectiveness of the organization and determines where training is needed and under which conditions it will be conducted. The organizational analysis should identify changing technology and automation; organizational goals; available resources; climate and support for training; and political trends such as sexual harassment and workplace violence.

The necessary information for the organizational analysis can be obtained from mission statements, strategic plans, staffing inventory (long and short-term staffing needs) and skills inventory (currently available as well as long and short-term needs). Other sources of information include indicators such as organizational climate indicators: labor/management relationships, grievances, absenteeism, turnover rates, employee behavior and customer complaints; and analysis of efficiency indicators, which include cost of labor, quality of products, cost of distribution and repairs.

TASK ANALYSIS

Task analysis provides data about a job, or a group of jobs, and the skills, knowledge, abilities and attitudes needed to achieve the best possible performance for that job.

The possible data sources for a task analysis may include job descriptions, performance standards (the objectives of the job's tasks and the standards by which they will be judged), performing the job, observing the job, asking the workers and their supervisors about the job, and analyzing operating problems like down-time and repairs.

INDIVIDUAL ANALYSIS

Individual analysis looks at how well an individual employee is performing his/her job. This analysis then determines which employees need training and the kind of training they need.

To obtain this information human resources personnel may look to performance evaluations, questionnaires, attitude surveys, interviews, work samples and individual performance problems.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT RESULTS

The outcome of the assessment should identify a number of training needs. The training manager will then meet with management to prioritize training based on timeliness, the number of employees who need to be trained and the available resources.

EVALUATING TRAINING OPTIONS

Now that the assessment process is complete, the training manager will determine the most suitable and cost effective way to meet the company's training needs. There are a variety of ways to accomplish training goals including:

- **In-house, Classroom Training**: This is the most traditional form of training. A group of employees are led through a program by an instructor, who may be an employee or an outside specialist in the subject matter. The advantage to this type of training is that it provides the opportunity for group interaction and allows the instructor to address the individual needs of the students. Some of the disadvantages may be coordinating schedules and major expenses for travel and lodging.
- **Public Seminars from Training Companies**: These seminars are most often held at hotels or conference centers and attendance fees are usually reasonable. However, the format may not be specific enough to meet the needs of the attendees, as classes can be rather generic. Also, class quality may be inconsistent. The training manager, or another designated employee, should attend the seminar prior to sending other employees to ensure that the content meets company's requirements.
- **Non-Classroom Training Programs**: These programs often come as packaged kits and can be administered to a group. This eliminates the need for an instructor. These courses typically consist of videos, student materials and a training guide. If a company chooses, they may have an instructor facilitate the training. This type of training can be less expensive than public seminars or classroom training since it can be used by a large number of employees and it also allows for individualized training. But, if participants are not self-motivated the lack of an instructor may hamper their learning process.
- **Executive Seminars**: Executive seminars are usually offered by colleges and universities and

are designed for middle to upper level management. These seminars provide participants with the ability to network with their contemporaries, but they can be costly.

- **Interactive Distance Learning:** This is one of the fastest growing trends in employee training and development. It can be administered to employees who cannot be assembled in the same location. This training is accomplished through video teleconferencing, company Intranets and the Internet. Interactive distance learning breaks the boundaries of traditional classroom training, but loses the structure and encouragement that can be provided by an instructor.

Choosing the best training program for your company encompasses many factors. Learning is a complex and individual process, which cannot be adopted with a "one-size-fits-all" approach. You must consider the extent to which your participants are open to the concepts that are covered. Communicating to all participants the specific learning objectives of the course and its benefits is very important. The participants need to feel that the subject matter has direct relevance in the day-to-day duties they perform. Techniques need to be devised to reinforce what is learned and how it should be applied to the job. Try to make the training sessions interesting, break up training sessions with lecture, discussion and exercises, and invite participation or interaction from attendees.

CONCLUSION

Creating a company environment that is conducive to continuing learning is essential in making company training and development programs successful. Encouragement and inspiration from senior management greatly assists in creating such an environment. Following are some practices used by companies that are recognized for their outstanding training and development programs:

- A mission statement that incorporates continuous learning.
- A systematic needs assessment process that is aligned to business goals.
- A tuition reimbursement policy.
- A program schedule that does not always require employees to attend during nonworking hours.
- A well-equipped and comfortable training facility (in-house or off-site).
- A company library or training room where employees have access to self-administered courses, tapes and books.

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