

Optimize Your Return on Employee Training and Organizational Development: 5 Mistakes To Avoid

We often look to change or optimize our way of conducting business because our customers and other stakeholders, even in the U.S., are global in expectation and style. According to a Harvard Business Review article, *"cultural intelligence is related to emotional intelligence, but it picks up where emotional intelligence leaves off. A person with high emotional intelligence grasps what makes us human and at the same time what makes each of us different from one another. A person with high cultural intelligence can somehow tease out a person's or group's behavior those features that would be true of all people and all groups, those peculiar to this person or this group, and those that are neither universal nor idiosyncratic."*¹

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The changes and optimization, we are addressing, are dependent on 'culture'. And all culture is behavioral--group behavior, which makes it more difficult to change.

Once a business or organization identifies and clearly states its business needs, the challenge of every leader is to ensure that employee performance meets or exceeds their goals. Why then do so many businesses and organizations not get the results they target after they spend extensive amounts of money and time on employee performance and development? This lack of measurable results is a reason employee development and training is one of the first budgets to be cut in lean times, creating a vicious cycle of sub-optimal performance at a time when organizations need higher performance and accountability from fewer resources.

Mistake # 1: Choosing the Wrong Training for the Right Problem

When we teach Negotiations, we often remind our clients that "It is the messenger you send!" who determines the outcome of the negotiation and agreement. In the name of efficiency, many organizations have resorted to "cookie-cutter" solutions to training and development. But

every business and organization needs to be effective first. Do your internal and external training and development teams understand the context of the problem you are looking to solve? Are they aligned with your business needs and performance needs? Are they helping you assess the needs of your organization? These are competencies that have stood the test of time in performance development.

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Mistake # 2: Failure to Quantify and Reinforce Behaviors

There are many approaches to adult learning but what has been effective consistently is reinforcing behaviors of different types, such as through coaching and/or peer best-practice exchange and support. Reinforcement does not need to be complicated, but it needs to be consistent, until the learning and behaviors become second nature. Often, organizations observe immediate benefits from a training or development program only to lose momentum because they have not followed through to reinforce the learning and the behavioral changes. A change in individual behavior, when supported, results in a change in culture --- business culture.

Mistake # 3: Failing To Integrate Varied Types of Training and Measuring Results

From the discussion in mistake #2 above, failure to integrate varied types of training, for example web-based training with face to face, reading with on the job training, behavioral with technical training is a common mistake. We are supporting employers and employees to first recognize behaviors, learn effective ones and reinforce new behaviors so they become a pattern. Any investment in training should yield organizations on-going results and that can only be achieved through thoughtful planning. "Quick-fixes" may sometimes be a necessary first step, but are not sustainable in the long term.

What we measure endures, and measuring itself focuses our efforts. An essential step in any training and development program is to measure. Yet, 'what' we measure is more important than just choosing to measure. For example, measuring sales results by sales numbers as a lagging indicator does not reveal the cause or the effectiveness of the training. Instead, we need to focus on tracking and measuring the behaviors we are looking to change or reinforce for

long term impact. No one should underestimate the effort required to reinforce new approaches.

Mistake # 4. Jumping to Conclusions

While this may seem obvious, we often jump to conclusions as leaders trying to juggle many aspects of running a business or organization. Let's assume the business or organizational goals and objectives are clearly communicated and sales performance remains poor. We can jump to the conclusion that our sales employees require refresher sales training. This can result in lots of activity to locate, interview and hire a trainer with subsequent training conducted. Then disappointment sets in when we do not get immediate results. The first step prior to investing in training and development is to ask why we are making this investment and is it the right investment-- answering the results we want?

Mistake # 5: Misdiagnosing the Cause

In our efforts not to jump to conclusions, we start with identifying the problem, in this case, not meeting our sales goals.

We then make a quick decision as to the root cause --our sales employees are not trained to sell. Often, this is either not the cause or it is not the entire set of causes. The solution(s) taken will be insufficient to provide or sustain the change we need. It is critical in performance optimization to separate process from behaviors, and this includes individual employees, leadership at all levels and the

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functioning of different team. Two major factors to consider are:

1. Organizational factors such as work systems and process, clarity of roles and expectations, access to information and tools, access to people and coaching.
2. Factors specific to the individual employee or leader such as skills and knowledge, inherent ability and job match.

Non-alignment between and within these factors can significantly affect performance. When the desired business performance is in conflict with one or more environment work factors, employees are often conflicted. For example, we have often encountered sales employees who are told strong relationships and customer retention are a priority but their compensation package is completely dependent on new customer acquisition only.

Thoughtful questions can help any organization avoid the mistakes made above. Your investment in training and development can pay dividends in employee performance and motivation or be a drain on your budget. Why not spend your resources wisely?

1. Cultural intelligence" by P. Christopher Earley and Elaine Mosakowski, Harvard Business Review, October 2004.

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Since 1990, Catherine Lee and her team at CDL & Associates has focused on helping our business, organization and university clients with all aspects of leadership development with particular focus on cultural intelligence. Our clients understand that we live in a global society wherever we are based. At CDL, we focus on results and believe that the behavioral approach offers specific, easy to-do changes to what you say and what you do--which give an immediate, positive, and large impact.