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Training for Results

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It is only the archaic company or manager that views the training of employees as a nuisance, something to be done during downtime and secondary to the performance of the institution. And this is no less true of the modern bank, whose employees must account for thousands of patrons' financial transactions while abiding by a slurry of state and federal statutes.

The negative effects of poor or non-existent training on employee performance are well documented and indisputable: wasted time and higher costs through inefficient working patterns, duplicated efforts, and mistakes; low morale and job dissatisfaction; high employee attrition rates and the resultant skill loss; loss of clients and resultant revenue.

So, too, the converse is true. A bank's commitment to excellence in employee training as an integral key to success in the company's mission reaps widely recognized rewards: time and cost savings through efficient and mistake-free working habits; high employee commitment and retention and a resultant solid skill base; customer retention and resultant revenue stream.

Makes sense right? But where is the bridge from commitment to excellence in employee training and the rewards from that training? How do you get a delicious looking, smelling, and tasting lasagna from a mass of cheese, noodles, and tomato sauce? You have to follow a tried-and-true recipe, of course.

Make sure your employee training programs include the following:

Engagement: When something is too long or monotonous, people yawn, lose focus, and lose interest. The key to engagement and retention is information + application + activity + variety. You give a small pocket of information, you show how it applies, you engage in an activity that demonstrates that, and you deliver it in a variety of ways: video examples, simulations, group discussions, games, brainstorming, etc.

Standardization: Develop the current best way to do something and make that the way everybody does it. This has the benefit of reducing errors and quickly defining any errors that occur.

Documentation: Whatever the current standard is, it needs to be documented so that it can be referred to as the standard, instead of relying on each person's interpretation of the standard. Make it visible and accessible.

Process Improvement: Have a mechanism in place so that anyone has the opportunity to improve the standard, but in a controlled way. This would involve a feedback loop. Somebody comes up with an idea to make things better than the standard: analyze it, test it, and evaluate it. If it turns out to be better than the current standard, then it is adopted as the new standard, it is documented and everyone is retrained.

Environmental Controls: Some things can be taught in a classroom, some things can be taught on a computer, and some things are better taught in the field. No matter what the environment, make it comfortable and make it safe. Allow for supervised failure, for that is how we most often learn, but never allow that failure to be a humiliating experience. It's a basic precept: if people feel safe and comfortable, then they stop worrying and focus on other things, like training.

Recognition: All you have to do is look to things like Facebook, Twitter, apps, and video games. People want to be recognized – they want to collect points, they want to advance levels, and they want feedback and rewards. If they do well and make progress, give it to them. The amount of recognition needs to be commensurate to the amount of their success.

Set the Example: All levels and positions in the organization should engage in learning and personal and professional improvement if the bank is committed to excellence in employee training as an integral key to success in the company's mission. That is effective leadership. And effective leadership reaps the rewards.

There are poor training programs that waste resources, produce disaffected employees, and are emblematic of limp and dysfunctional organizations. Then there are the companies people want to work for: those that are all abuzz with the hum of success. These institutions have put together the right recipe for a solid, effective employee training program at all levels. They don't sit down at the table to a glum mess of cheese, noodles, and tomato sauce. They sit down to a beautiful, hot, delicious lasagna!

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