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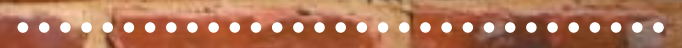


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# TRAIN ME A HABIT

## HOW ORGANIZATIONS USE TRAINING TO GAIN A COMPETITIVE EDGE

It was a sound I hadn't heard before, a 'ping' followed by a long silence. This sequence was repeated until the executive answered his phone. This distinctive ring tone was like the sound a NASA deep space probe might make as it searches the outer reaches of our solar system. While this executive was one of more than a dozen seated in a nondescript conference room, this distraction was enough to break our concentration and further prohibit a few key messages from developing out of his organization's presentation for a multimillion-dollar opportunity. I started thinking about NASA's Galileo probe crashing into Jupiter's moon, Europa, while the executive answered his phone. Now there was one long ping followed by continuing silence. As he hung up his phone, I wondered why voice mail was even invented.

How does a speaker compete with cell phones going off in the same room as the presentation? What about other executives walking in on a training class to yank a key employee out of the room? It might be even more challenging to implement a training program when the team being trained is expected to be performing their regular jobs too. According to the American Society of Training and Development, U.S. corporations spend \$109.25 billion on

employee learning and development annually with one quarter of this amount going to outside training sources. This translates into \$1,616 per employee in 2005 over an approximate 43-hour period.

How can an organization make sure their investment in training is being properly realized? And how can training be used to gain a competitive edge? For starters, organizations need to change their definition of training. They also need to realize training will improve their performance and the best place to gain a competitive edge in training is through the use of technology.

### CHANGE THE LEARNING MINDSET

The key to an effective training program is more than requesting cell phones be turned off and holding a training class off-site to minimize distractions. The key to creating a learning organization is changing the training mindset. *In Learning Organizations: Developing Cultures for Tomorrow's Workplace*, by Fred Kofman and Peter Senge, the authors state, "Why do we derive our self-esteem from knowing as opposed to learning? Why do we persist in fragmentation and piecemeal analysis as the world becomes more and more interconnected? We are discovering that moving forward is an exercise in per-

sonal commitment and community building." True organizational transformation first takes place with personal transformation and the commitment to a lifetime learning process. In other words, the role of the motivated individual who wants to learn more and grow will always be pivotal to the training process.

At Hickok Cole Architects, a regional architectural firm, their main motivation for providing training to their key architects was to improve their presentation ability in front of potential clients. If their designers were able to spend more time honing their presenta-

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tion, they would have a better chance to connect with the client. This connection would happen over a few simple, yet powerful messages. However, as the program progressed and they began to see improvements in terms of employee excitement and presentation results, the topic of conversation shifted from one of mere training to creating an environment of 'presentation excellence.' They felt the time invested in presentation content and delivery would 'raise the bar' for the entire firm a little bit at a time.

HCA also integrated their current client workload with their desire to make an investment in their employees. This meant they started their training program a few hours before the start of a normal business day. I have often heard this thinking referred to as 'taking one step backwards in order to get two (or more) steps ahead.' Real self-improvement is an investment in oneself and something that taken collectively within an organization will definitely provide 'an order of magnitude' benefit. Even though the major training program has been completed at HCA, they have shifted their mindset to spend as much time as possible on quality. It is no secret that this commitment to training came from the top.

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## TRAINING AS STRATEGIC VALUE

C-Level Perceptions of the Strategic Value of Learning, a joint research paper by ASTD and IBM, written in January 2006, echoes this change in mindset. The paper, highlighting research conducted with 53 C-level executives, stated, "Learning provides strategic value to the enterprise, business unit and individual capability level of an organization." The paper went on to further state, "Perceptions of stakeholders are a key indicator of learning's value." Clearly HCA successfully shifted the perceptions of their architects through creating a culture of presentation excellence. One thing that was done successfully was to properly set expectations and then monitor the training as it progressed along the way.

Larger organizations have taken this mindset to an entirely new level by creating corporate universities. However, changing the name of the training function within an organization is not enough. The book, *The Corporate University Workbook: Launching the 21st Century Learning Organization* by Kevin Wheller and Eileen Clegg, states "A true corporate university has moved beyond training and education and into the daily challenge of getting results. It provides leadership in supporting people and processes to achieve bottom-line success for the organization." A corporate university is part training, part marketing and part business development. It is training with specific intention.

Many organizations have created a Chief Learning Officer (CLO) position to run the corporate university and other training initiatives. This person is responsible for interacting with the executive-level management team to provide significant value to the organization. One of the ways this C-level executive's performance is measured is through value to the bottom line. Herein lies the danger, getting too caught up with demonstrating ROI in financial or accounting terms. Many organizations even try to implement proprietary measuring systems and fail to provide a direct cause and effect when it comes to training. This is where the mindset of the learning organization needs to be further influenced. Furthermore, a key finding of the ASTD/IBM research paper was that CLO's should not work so hard to convince the C-suite of the value of investing in learning. Instead the C-suite's value the trusted relationship with the

CLO's more than the ROI data.

Instead of trying to find a direct bottom line benefit to training, organizations must realize training has an overall value that does not need to be quantified in specific terms. Knowledge Asset Management, a firm based in Bethesda, MD, traced the S&P (Standards & Poor's) performance of public companies for three years. They tracked companies who spent twice as much as other firms on employee development. Their findings showed organizations with the largest investments in people performed 17 to 35 percent better than the S&P Index over the period measured. Training does have an impact on the bottom line and it is also a further way to retain employees.

## A HUMAN CAPITAL STRATEGY

The knowledge that training provides associated value to an organization is proof enough to justify continued investments in training and education. According to the article "Training Revs Up," in the *Society of Human Resource Management HRMagazine*, Hewlett Packard's training budget for 2005 was \$300 million, a 10 percent increase over the year before. The article went on to state, "Companies like HP recognize that it is more cost-efficient and competitive to develop talent from within rather than compete for talent on the outside. HR experts and trainers have been arguing for this strategy ever since 'the war for talent' dominated the labor market in the late 1990s." Organizations are finally realizing the importance of training and are making a long-term sustainable strategic investment in training. Organizations are increasing their training, but the emphasis has shifted.

However, training shouldn't be done at the last minute. When training is introduced gradually with active involvement of the participants, the results are more long lasting and there will be greater retention of the knowledge. This idea comes from a Chinese proverb that says, "If I hear it I'll forget, if I write it down I'll remember, but only if I do it will I understand." To create a true learning environment an organization needs to have consistency by 'raising the training bar' over the long-term. The way to do this effectively is to build a Confidence Baseline among all employees so the consistent training over the long-term will continue to produce higher quality results.

The term many organizations have

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been adopting for this sustainable investment in training is known as having a human capital learning strategy. This strategy is frequently divided into knowledge transfer, customer education to sell more products and services, government compliance and managerial skills training such as training executives to increase their communication power. Moreover, as the world becomes more interconnected, there will be a continued requirement for many training functions to be centralized so as to deliver consistent training to many locations around the globe. The delivery of effective training programs by a Corporate University or spearheaded by a CLO will increasingly involve the use of technology.

### THE TECHNOLOGY ADVANTAGE

As the CLO or training function within an organization starts to augment delivery through the use of technology, there will be more collaboration between the CLO and the CTO (chief technology officer). The CLO and CTO will be charged with delivering the training to employees in remote locations through the use of downloadable Podcasts, streaming video and

audio programs. In addition, there will be continued momentum for content to be created by employees in order to preserve corporate knowledge.

While some training will be augmented by technology, technology will not replace instructor-led training. This is primarily due to the value of being in the same room with colleagues as well as being able to benefit from the body language of the instructor. In a groundbreaking study in 1971 on the importance of body language in communication, Dr. Albert Mehrabian of ULCA found that visual communication makes up 55 percent of the total communication picture. This means that technology will only be able to deliver the 7 percent of verbal and the 38 percent vocal component making up 45 percent of communication. Remember, the best way to learn will always be face-to-face with an instructor or speaker augmented by technology.

The effective use of technology is perhaps an organization's hidden advantage. Peter Senge's groundbreaking book, *The Fifth Discipline*, was recently updated after 14 years. He said, "In the long run the only sustainable competitive advantage is your organization's

ability to learn faster than the competition." The best way to do this is to compliment an organization's investment in training with technology. I know this all too well as a member of the National Speakers Association (NSA). In addition to one annual and regional conference, a learning university, monthly meetings and a magazine, I receive an audio CD. I frequently play the CD in my car and transfer key tracks to my iPod for repeat listening. I also have the opportunity to download Podcasts from the NSA website for further learning and reinforce-

ment. However, I am highly motivated to learn too.

When organizations move from viewing training as an expense to training being part of a long-term investment in their employees, a true learning environment will be created. By investing in employees, an organization will be more productive and be better able to retain top talent.

Mark Sincevich works with individuals and organizations to increase their communication power through a unique photography angle. He can be contacted at (301) 654-3010 or [www.staashpress.com](http://www.staashpress.com).



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