How to Improve Productivity via Customised Training

We all know that training or learning is a very important part of business and for that matter, all aspects of life. With the right attitude, we all live and learn every day. Sometimes, via the normal events that happen each day, other times it is due to our purposeful application through an organised course. Whichever way we do it, the benefit of training is indisputable, especially in business.

As important as we all believe it is, many businesses fail to plan, and therefore fail to implement any organised training. This lack of training generally leads to many negatives, including:

- Disheartened employees who get frustrated due to the lack of knowledge and skills to do a specific function. Typically, they'll be dismissed for poor performance or they just leave out of frustration. One of the most common reasons you'll hear from a departing employee is that there was little to no training provided. Yes, it can also be a very convenient excuse and in many instances far removed from the real reason for the departure.
- Job tasks take longer, delivered with poor quality leading to customer complaints, large warranty costs and worse of all, lost customers.
- The employer is not an attraction to potential new recruits. A very common question asked at interviews is if specific training is provided. And in specialised industries, finding people with the right skill set is very difficult – customised training goes a long way to bridge the gap.
- Employees develop their own way of doing things, ignoring company policies and procedures which in turn cause a host of other issues.
- Customers need reassurance that their partner and supplier, your business, is continually providing proper training to its employees. Lack of training, perceived or real, could mean loss of contract and/or loss of a loyal customer.

In summary, all of these negatives come together to have an overall detrimental effect on the business. But negatives are opportunities. Small and large businesses must acknowledge that training is a necessary requirement for ongoing success.

However, many of the above points will not be satisfied by simply providing generic type training – that is, training which will satisfy some KPI checklist but delivers little in the way of improvement to the employees and the business. Too many businesses spend a lot of money on generic type training which are too general and often fail to provide any real benefit. The most effective way of achieving maximum benefit is to customise your training to suit the employees in alignment with the business needs.

Yes, customise training does involve spending a great deal more time and effort to organise the package but to achieve maximum benefit, it is the only way to go.

What is meant by customised training? There are two main issues to address – one is to ensure the training aligns with the current knowledge and skill level of the employees to be trained; and the other addresses their needs and the needs of the business. As an example, the subject of Project Management is a specific discipline but applies across many industries with varying products and services. As a result, there are many levels of knowledge and skill required, from the project management of small $10k manufacturing equipment installation to a $200m multi-storey commercial building. In addition, many businesses operate differently to one another, utilising unique methods and processes to deliver their products to their specific markets. Therefore, to maximise the benefit of any training, the course must be tailored to take into account the current skill level of the employees and their subsequent needs. And, it must be specifically orientated to the business including its products and services, its policies and processes, its target market, and its own objectives for the training.

So, what are the best steps to take to develop the ideal customised training package which addresses these critical requirements and most importantly, improves productivity? Consider the following;

1. Identify the Subject Matter. What are the business issues? Issues specific to employees? They're typically intertwined. Will a standard "generic" training package provided by an external provider adequately address the subject matter? Or is it too generic?

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2. <u>Identify the Skills, Knowledge and Needs of Employees</u>. What qualifications, skills and experience do they have? Are they all at the same level or does it vary greatly between employees? What are their learning objectives? Remember, a customised training package must be set to suit their current knowledge and skill set and meet their learning objectives.
3. <u>Identify the Needs of the Business</u>. What does the business want out of this training? Retention of personnel? Improved delivery times? Improved quality? Less customer complaints? Be quite specific on what the learning objectives are – avoid being vague. It may mean that the subject matter may change from its original concept as defined in point 1. The final outcome of course is to improve productivity.
4. <u>Develop the Training Plan</u>. Outline the specific topics you wish to address, in what order and their duration. These will be aligned with the needs of the business and the employees and presented in a manner which relates and is applied to the real world.
5. <u>Develop the Material</u>. This requires the most work and it's advisable to appoint a leader who seeks input from a number of people and collates the material.
6. <u>Align with the Business Systems</u>. Another common failing of generic programs is they do not take into account the specific business policies, processes and procedures. To have maximum affect, the training must take into account the company's business systems.
7. <u>Workshop Activity</u>. Avoid the "I talk – you listen" classroom type environment and always look at integrated workshop activities to improve the learning experience. Provide an interactive environment and workshop the important elements. With a bit of lateral thinking, any subject matter can be configured into a workshop activity.
8. <u>Deliver the Training</u>. You'll need to set aside an appropriate time which suits the business and the trainees. Issues to consider include time of day in relation to alertness; avoiding interruptions; clearly outlined breaks; etc. The person who delivers the training must be capable of speaking in front of people and good at maintaining interest.
9. <u>Solicit feedback</u>. This will help to refine the training for the next time whether it be a new group or a refresher course.
10. <u>Develop and Issue a Certificate</u>. Acknowledge and recognise the employees' attendance for training on a specific subject matter.
11. <u>Refresher Training</u>. Once you have developed the customised training package, it is advisable to undertake refresher training at set time intervals. This ensures that the individuals remain in sync with the learning objectives. It also provides additional feedback to further improve the training.

Customised training should be a standard requirement of every business. Each business has its own systems, set of unique products and services, market requirements, customers and a business plan which identifies its clear objectives. Each business has employees who have varying level of skills, experience and knowledge and therefore their own unique set of needs and learning objectives. Customised training will align these objectives and maximises the learning of each attendee which in turn provides added interest and motivation to improve and excel in their role. Meeting the needs of the employees and the business will help deliver sustainable productivity improvements.