

Training - A Potential Waste of Money?

I regularly look at what local training companies are offering in the way of coaching and sales courses and I noticed recently that a local provider was now providing a "Management Development Programme" spanning eight half days and covering eight management subjects from "team leadership" through "coaching others" to "delegation" amongst other topics. The eight half days will lead to a "recognised award" but I noticed that there is no follow-up mechanism to ensure that delegates are implementing what they learn on the programme.

I have two major "gripes" with this approach. Firstly, a half-day on most management subjects such as coaching will only cover the basics and may serve only to frustrate delegates as opposed to actually develop their capability. Coaching, for example, needs time and practice and managers will not be able to coach after only a half-day or even after a full day's training. It is an arguable point, but I believe that at least two days intensive training, in respect to coaching, is needed and that follow-up coaching to the training is essential. Similarly sales courses where there is more theory than practice and no sustained follow-up are, in my opinion, a waste of time and money.

The standard of training may be high on a particular course but the fact that if there is no follow up, either by one to one coaching or through "progress review" days concerns me. How is the learning from the course going to be sustained in the delegates when, most likely, they will all return to the workplace, and immediately be thrown back into regular routines and pressure of workloads? Most delegates will return to work practices that they know and are comfortable with and as such new techniques and/or practices may not be tried out. My experience also tells me that the "glossy" brochures or course folders are neatly placed on the library shelf and may never be looked again until it is time for a clear out!

To illustrate my point, let me tell you the tale of a former manager colleague. I telephoned this former colleague to try and find out what their present company policy was towards coach training for managers.

The manager stated. "The company policy is that all managers will undergo coaching training and that the model of choice is GROW. I like this model as it now gives me a structure for my coaching whereas beforehand it was a bit haphazard."

I replied that, had he not remembered that we had been introduced to this model of coaching almost seven years ago and that we had actually been through a refresher, three years ago with a another training company? His reply to this was telling:

"I have a vague recollection, and I do believe I have the folders somewhere. But you forget that when I went through these courses I was new to the manager's role and there was an amazing amount of change about due to restructuring together with changes of personnel and roles. There was no real time to digest the training and certainly no time to implement it! I never got any support anyhow!"

So, after seven years and three expensive training courses later, the GROW model of coaching has finally managed to be taken up by this particular manager. And I rate this manager as one of the better ones I have worked with. This is a manager who I know is dedicated to his development!

So what can you do to get a better return from training?

Firstly, choose your training provider very carefully. As well as checking on their course content and structure, check their price, reputation, and standard of trainer. Make sure that they can provide some form of follow-up coaching support service. You may have to pay extra for this but it can be very worthwhile. It could be face to face coaching, or telephone coaching, or simply an "open-door" support line whereby delegates if they have queries or need help with materials, can simply telephone or e-

mail the provider, who in turn will provide support by relevant means. Avoid those companies that come in, deliver the training, hand over glossy folders and disappear!

In addition to the training provider supplying on-going support, I believe that line managers who put their staff on training courses have a duty to support them, before, during and after the training. An effective manager will sit down with an employee and coach them to identify what they are going to learn from the training. These learning objectives should be documented and once the training is over, then the manager should be sitting down with the employee and coaching them to self-analyse how they fared against the objectives that they set themselves. Vitaly, how is the employee going to implement this learning in the workplace? What support is the manager going to give the employee to implement this learning so as it becomes sustainable and the employee's capability grows?

Whether or not the Training Provider provides on-going or follow up support, the manager has in this case to act as a coach and mentor and ensure that employees get both the benefit of on-going training but also the follow-up support and challenge from their line manager.

Industry must spend “millions” on training (still not enough!) and I believe that a lot of it is wasted because Training Providers do not provide adequate follow-up support and also that company line managers do not take time to sit down with their employees to agree learning objectives and then review these objectives with a view to effective implementation of new skills into the workplace.

Let's stop wasting training budgets. Choose your provider carefully and ensure line management supports employees before, during and after their training.

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