

Getting More Out Of Your Training Investment

Employee training has taken on increased importance in the past few years as more people are exiting the workforce than are entering it. This trend is likely to increase until 2010, when fewer people will be retiring than will be graduating from colleges, universities and trade schools. Companies have recognized that training adds to retention of employees in addition to equipping them for specific tasks at hand. The question is not whether to train, **but how best to train.**

Employers are faced with a wide variety of training options today including hiring a training staff, equipping internal subject matter experts who will train, purchasing professional training courses and sending staff members to AMA-type courses. All of these approaches require commitment and resources.

Expense or Investment?

The important question to ask is:

“Are my training dollars an EXPENSE or an INVESTMENT?”

The answer to this question lies in whether or not the employee being trained has changed his or her behavior or improved his or her performance as a result of the training they received. Training that is entertaining, factual and comprehensive is nice, but unless employees are able to take what they've learned and apply it in a way that increases sales, generates profits, retains customers or causes compliance with the law, your training dollars are not well spent.

Just as there is a vast difference between hearing and listening, there is a vast difference between being exposed to performance-improving, behavior-changing information and learning it well enough to apply it on the job. Test the validity of this statement by recalling the last training session you attended, and listing at least four specific things you are now doing differently as a result of the training. If you are having a hard time remembering, chances are that you weren't able to retain and apply what was presented. People cannot apply what they do not *learn*.

Take this quick quiz:

In most learning situations, people RETAIN and APPLY more of what they learn when they

- A. are told what to do
- B. are shown what to do
- C. read about what to do
- D. discover what to do

Based on your answer, identify the approach(es) that most training programs take. The most effective training leads its students to discover the key points by interacting with the materials and becoming forever changed...something that traditional training does not do effectively.

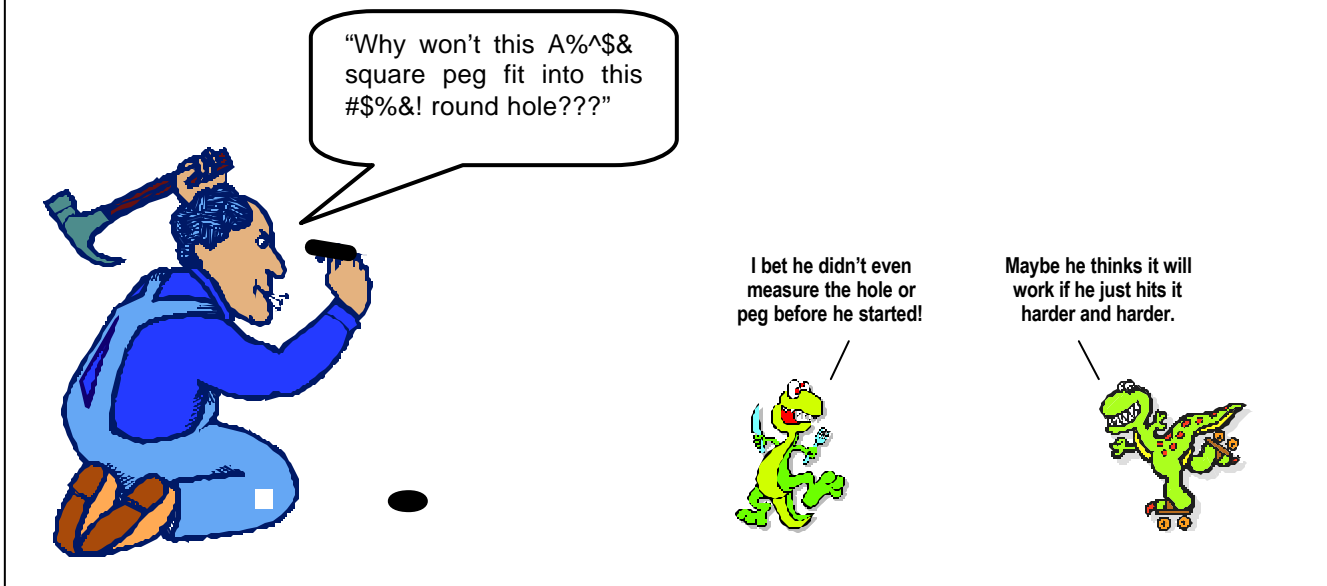
Traditional training presents information and concepts in a combined lecture-and-print format. This hear-and-read presentation may occasionally be accentuated by demonstrations or examples. An entertaining (or not so entertaining) presenter leads you through a workbook full of information. Then the workbook is placed carefully on the shelf and perhaps consulted once or twice over the next few years.

A Discovery-Based Approach is Better

We suggest an approach that requires participants to *discover* the key concepts and principles. By way of example, consider that you are training 15 managers on the topic of *How Managers Utilize the Different Strengths of Staff Members*. A traditional approach might outline the topic and provide a step-by-step 'how to' primer on different approaches and techniques.

A **Discovery Based Training™** approach might be to assign the 15 managers to three tables of five managers each. Provide the exercise in the box below and give the groups 10 minutes to discuss their findings among themselves. Have each group choose a representative to present the key lessons to the rest of the class.

Consider the diagram below. With the people seated at your table, discuss and identify at least five key lessons on how managers could better utilize the strengths and differences of the members of their staff. On a flipchart, list the key lessons and select a group member to present your findings to the rest of the class.



It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words. In this case, it is worth 20 minutes of discussion of impactful concepts that managers can immediately begin using on the job. They will be quickly able to unlock the productivity latent in staff members with different talents, experiences and abilities. By discussing the concepts among themselves, participants discover approaches that maximize or minimize performance. One good idea piggy-backs upon another, the dawn of understanding breaks through, and participants are energized by the topic. In a small group everyone contributes, and learning becomes fun.

By the way, a few of the key lessons of the diagram are:

- ♦ you get the best results when you select the right person for the task
- ♦ identify the skill set you need, and assign the closest match on your staff
- ♦ you must know the skills, talents, abilities and experience levels of your staff
- ♦ don't try to force a square peg into a round hole

How many more did you spot?

To help your management team become more productive, contact Boyer Management Group today at 215-942-0982, visit us on the Internet at www.boyermanagement.com or email Hank Boyer at hank@boyermanagement.com. The above article was excerpted from *Managing Through People II* © 1999-2002 from Boyer Management Group.