

Training Programs Need More than Good Information

Show your commitment to service by training your employees well.

BY JOHN TSCHOHL

Service is critical to the success of your organization. The challenge is to make it a priority with your employees. You can't merely say it's a priority; you must demonstrate your commitment to service by training each employee in how to provide service so exceptional that it separates you from your competitors. You must train each employee within the first two weeks of hiring and, to create a change in behavior, you must provide additional training at least every six months.

Whether you purchase a training program or develop your own, five elements are critical to its design. To ensure that the program captures your employees' attention, keeps enthusiasm high, and produces the results you're seeking, you must:

Make it fun and entertaining. You can't create an emotional buy-in with employees if your training program is dry and dull. Employees want to learn how to get results tomorrow without being bored to death by detail and complexity in the learning process today. You can make a point more effectively using humor than drowning employees in statistics and theories. If employees don't find your message entertaining, they won't retain it. Use a variety of media—

audio-visual productions, flip charts, written materials, and role-playing. Alternate the pace of each session to keep interest high.

Focus on fundamentals. People aren't born with the skills and dispositions required to provide exceptional customer service. In fact, if they're left alone to apply what they learn from salespeople while they are customers, they're more likely to be oblivious, overbearing, and unavailable than concerned and helpful. Be sure they receive the basic foundation for superior performance.

Use attractive packaging. If you want to sell employees on the importance and quality of a training program, make sure the materials are well-packaged and communicate value. Some organizations produce or use training materials that look like trash in an effort to save money. If their annual reports or brochures showed the same disregard for quality packaging, they'd be hard pressed to attract support. When developing a training program, keep in mind that you're selling a concept to your employees. Don't discount the power of attractive packaging.

Build 80% of training time around group interaction. Training programs based on lecture are worthless. The key is to drive your subject emotionally, and that's best done through experi-

ential learning. The facilitator should present ideas, then get employees to discuss how they can use those ideas to improve your organization. When employees are actively involved in the learning process, they're much more likely to retain the information and put it to use.

Build your employees' self-esteem. Rarely do training programs uplift employees' spirits or help them become better in their own lives. You can create a win-win environment by using your training program to build your employees' self-esteem. Employees who feel good about themselves treat others—including your customers—well. And that will have a positive impact on your entire organization.

When employees have the skills and tools they need to do their jobs, they are far more likely to do them well. The key to designing an effective training program is to capture the attention of employees and to motivate them to practice what they've learned. When you do that, you will create behavior changes that will result in improved performance. ■

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