

Motivate Workers with Training Opportunities

By Denise Outlaw

Use training as a hiring, retention, and productivity tool.

Offering a full scope of training is a necessity if you want to hire the best people and keep them happy and productive. No matter how small your budget for training and development, you need to find creative ways to ensure that employees are learning continually. Get started with these tips:

Use education and training as spurs to attract the best employees. Stress your learning environment as a “perk” when hiring. Those who are attracted to learning organizations tend to be curious, innovative problem-solvers — exactly the type of people you want in your organization.

Keep employees (both paid and volunteer) happy and productive by asking them regularly what type of education and training will be most helpful to them. Survey them to be sure you’re meeting their training needs. Doing so will keep them feeling valued, stimulated, and motivated.

Look for daily opportunities to transfer your knowledge to others to ensure that growth and development are occurring continuously. In addition to casual sharing, provide communications such as regular e-mails, in-house newsletters, learning groups, and book clubs. Assign an article, paper, or book for everyone to read and discuss each month, for example.

Tie training to your organization’s goals for the year. In addition, ask everyone to create their own lists of educational objectives for the year. Check often to be sure people are meeting these goals.

Encourage staff members to establish networks of professionals with expertise in their fields of interest. Train them in using vehicles such as social media for this purpose.

Provide mentoring programs, both formally and informally. Newer employees need someone who can answer their questions and explain unwritten rules and critical organizational information. Be a mentor yourself, and ask others to follow your lead. Both the mentor and the mentee will gain immeasurably from the experience.

Create peer-collaboration groups where people can enhance one another’s learning using unstructured but focused conversations about daily practice. Staff can share mistakes they’ve made and what

they learned as a result, thus keeping others from making the same errors. They can also resolve issues related to workplace conflicts.¹

When it comes to your board, peer-to-peer training is especially effective, because board members are more likely to listen to their colleagues, it provides an interesting challenge to those doing the training, and people learn best what they teach others. You can also use staff, where appropriate, or bring in a community leader or subject expert. Techniques such as games, tours, reality practice, and videos will help impart the information in a more interactive way.²

Whenever you introduce any new technology or other workplace change, do so slowly and with plenty of training for everyone involved.

Form partnerships with nearby universities, colleges, and technical learning centers. Perhaps you can participate in studies they’re conducting and in return gain access to a treasure trove of learning opportunities for your staff members.

Take advantage of Webinars, online courses, and other forms of Web-based learning. Develop online training modules that all employees can access. Such learning is most fruitful when people have a chance to discuss the material afterward with other learners.

Always put learning in context. People will get the most out of their training if you discuss it with them beforehand and afterward. Training in isolation won’t be as rewarding or effective.

Staff-board retreats can be exhilarating learning experiences for everyone involved. You needn’t wait for a planning session in order to hold a retreat. A day in a different environment, with growth and learning as the goal, is exciting and motivating.

Make good use of teams. Working on projects together will expedite learning and growth, especially if you choose team members carefully. Try to include a mixture of personalities, learning styles, and leadership capabilities on each team.

¹Phelan, Anne M., Constance A. Barlow, & Sharon Iversen, “Occasioning Learning in the Workplace: The Case of Interprofessional Peer Collaboration,” *Journal of Interprofessional Care*, 20(4).

²Temkin, Terrie, “Board Problems Reflected in Training Requests,” *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 32, No. 5 (www.NonprofitWorld.org/members).

Use coaching to facilitate people's development. You don't need to hire a professional coach. You and others in your organization can coach people by helping them live up to their best abilities. Coaching is a matter of letting people discover and actualize their greatest talents. Rather than telling people what to do, a good coach coaxes them to find their own solutions.

Provide training in management, leadership, and supervisory skills. Studies show that such training improves retention, productivity, and job satisfaction.³

Encourage board and staff members to develop new ideas for organization-wide education, training, and development. Consider providing incentives (such as gift cards, invitations to lunch, and other simple rewards) for those who come up with the best ideas.

Introduce as much diversity as possible. In addition to hiring diverse board and staff members, bring in people with many different points of view to talk to your employees and board members. Consider trading one of your board members for someone from another organization's board now and then to bring in a fresh perspective.

Offer mini-sabbaticals. These may last a few weeks or just a few hours. Their objective is to give people a chance to get away from the office, think things through in new settings and new ways, and bring back their insights to share with the rest of the organization. 

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³ Renner, Lynette M., Rebecca L. Porter, & Steven Preister, "Improving the Retention of Child Welfare Workers by Strengthening Skills and Increasing Support for Supervisors," *Child Welfare*, 88(5).

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