

# Training Is Not an Option

Those that understand the importance of training absolutely *know* this to be a fact. It's not a belief or an opinion, or a preference. It's certainly not an attitude. It's a cold hard fact: *training is important*.

But there's a strange problem here; and you probably know what it is, either directly or indirectly.

Many people know that training is important – because, at one time or another, and in one form or another, we've all been valuably trained in something, or trained someone else to do something useful – yet this basic knowledge is not widely reflected in the world of work. Its clear importance is not fully understood, and therefore, not fully exploited to make life easier and more profitable.

## Unraveling the Strange Problem: Changing Perceptions

The core of this problem has to do with that important postmodern word: *perception*.

For decades now – centuries, arguably – training has been seen as something that supports the workforce. This position stems largely from the perception that training is an extension of education. Since education has been traditionally viewed as a system of supporting human growth and development, workforce training has slid conveniently, some might say logically, into this existing groove of thinking.

So why is this a problem of perception?

Because in the modern workforce – and that of the foreseeable future – the idea that workforce training exists as a *support system* is dangerously outdated. The notion of *support* implies that something is important; but not necessarily vital, and certainly not essential. And it's because of this view that in many workplaces, training is viewed as an *enhancer*; something valuable, yes, but ultimately optional. Something to invest in or focus upon if revenues support it, or if time permits it. But certainly nothing essential.

This perception is *utterly out of date!*

Training is no longer *optional*. It's not an enhancer, a supporter, or a *nice to have* thing. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, an organization's capacity to effectively train its people is part of its ability to survive. And if that capacity isn't there – or if it's defective – then the organization itself will reveal that flaw in a number of destructive ways, including loss of bottom line profits.

## Why the Skilled Workforce Makes Training Essential

It's a misnomer to think that so-called *skilled workers* are those human beings who emerge from university or college and bring with them some kind of technical or practical acumen. That may have been true a few decades ago; but no longer, and never again.

In today's world, *everyone* is a skilled worker. From the receptionist with the high school education to the CFO with an MBA, the entire workforce has become a skilled landscape; and that means that there is arguably *no* position that isn't in need of continuous training.

Each member of a team, a unit, and a company can no longer be viewed as individual silos focusing on their singular task within a limited sphere of activities. Rather, today, *each person is a part of a skilled workforce*; and if there are gaps or lacks in any area, the entire workforce will suffer. And make no mistake: this suffering isn't merely emotional or cultural (though that is a part of it). This suffering is financial.

## Training = Profit

When there are gaps in the skilled workforce – gaps caused by lack of training – then, automatically, work become inefficient and money is lost.

How *much* money is lost depends on the type of gap and how it manifests; but without doubt, regardless of whether a company sells flowers or microchips, a gap in the skilled workforce costs money.

In the past, this gap was typically seen only in terms of sales, such as whether a lack of training caused a sale to be lost. Now, however, we know without *any* economic doubt that the costs of ineffective or non-existent training gaps *go far* beyond lost sales. These additional financial costs include: rework, missed profits (smaller profits due to inefficiency), and misallocated resources (money spent trying to fix a gap could be better spent elsewhere). There's also lost market share, lost potential word-of-mouth advertising from satisfied (or merely served) customers, and the list goes on.

## Understanding why Training is Important

It bears repeating: training can no longer be viewed as a support system, like a good benefits program or a leading-edge technical infrastructure. In the skilled workforce of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, training is *essential*. It is the core engine of a company, because it supports the *entire* skilled workforce. And, frankly, there is no other way – whatsoever – for a company to comply with this paradigm shift than to understand that training is important. Or rather, that it's essential.

## Not All Training is Created Equally

A typical and rational concern here might be that not all types of workers require the same training. Actually, this is perfectly true, and not a concern; it's just a basic fact of the new world of work.

Absolutely: your sales team will not require the same training as your customer service people. While there might be elements that apply to both – negotiation skills and cultural awareness spring to mind – there is no need to envision a cookie-cutter approach to training. In fact, the old model of training – the one where static, one-size-fits-all training was *rolled-out* through a company from CEO to Intern is tragically (and again, dangerously) out of date. Successful training – the kind that retains profit and creates more profit – must reflect the needs of a particular team or function within a company.

This may sound expensive; and in fact, one of the big reason that old-fashioned *roll-out* training has been relied upon is because it's seemingly easy to administrate, and even easier to predict costs (as needlessly high as they may be).

Yet as economists are clearly pointing out – without emotion, without bias, in the great way that economists point things out – this old-fashioned training approach is *more expensive* than the new, customized skilled workforce training. This is because focused training can be measured and tracked much more practically than generic company-wide training. Furthermore, this customization allows training to be tweaked and adjusted as business needs and market conditions require.

## A Final Word...

Keep in mind that the key argument here isn't that *training is good*. This isn't pro-training boosterism; and it's certainly not a lobbying effort on behalf of financially neglected Training and Development professionals across the globe. The perception that training is essential is sourced in the emergence of the most powerful, and possibly most dynamic, labor market concept in history: the skilled workforce.

And the message that it's telling us? Clear and simple: training is *not* an option.

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