

Training

By John Vamos

My friend Tom O'Toole of Beechworth Bakery fame has a great saying.

In response to an employer who was battling with the 'to train or not to train my staff' challenge, and lamented "What if I train them and they leave?" Tom's reply is "What if you don't...and they stay?"

I could not put it better myself. This article then is about making it possible for you to develop a strategy for and policy on training your staff. Read it carefully and as you do, think about each of your direct reports and what the application of these principles may mean for them. Oh, before you actually read on, I'd like to point out one more thing. Consider this:

"Every single employee has a responsibility to do something every year that makes them better at their job this year, than they were last year."

Now, of course there are exceptions to every 'rule', but if you don't immediately identify with this statement then there are much better pieces on this How-to webpage for you to spend your time on than this one!

Well... if you insist then:

What is it called?

First up let's stop talking about training. It is after all what athletes do and, unless your business is one that lives and breathes on physical fitness the term is old fashioned, out of date and inappropriate. What we are talking about is the 'development' of your staff. And they can develop in two ways - as people or as professionals. So let's call this our Personal and Professional Development Policy.

Two Types of Development

So, for our purposes there are two types of learning that you might contemplate sponsoring for your staff. There are those programs that make them better at what they do for you and those that make them a better person.

Personal Development

Nobody was born perfect and we have our own unique combinations of strengths and weaknesses. Your Job Descriptions would clearly identify the characteristics you expect in a person that might equip them for the challenges their position will bring. The person in the job right now is unlikely to demonstrate them all. Isolating those that need attention and finding the right course to help them is going to improve their character or personal skill set and then, indirectly, their professional performance. These courses with 'indirect' application can often have the best impact in developing the staff member, their sense of loyalty and their relationship with you. The downside is that finding a good program that fits this type of challenge is very hard. Some providers tend to be airheads, who talk up their results, overcharge like crazy and deliver little! So do your homework.

Professional Development

Three types:

1. On-the-job. Formal coaching by your people on your systems and procedures.
2. Industry or Professional Qualifications. Provided by Associations or Industry bodies leading to some formal designation or credit. Often these courses are compulsory and guarantee eligibility to hold or retain certain positions.



3. Non-specific Academic or Trade Qualifications. Basically this covers any recognised course that may have broad application beyond the staff members' current position.

Of course my favourite is on-the-job because it is free! Well, perhaps not free, perhaps not even close to free but it has many collateral benefits. When I think of what is involved here, I am indicating dedicated time applied to education on proprietary or best practice systems and procedures.

The collateral benefits are those benefits you derive when a learning organisation imparts knowledge on a new staff member. It represents three things. It is an opportunity for the new person to learn, an opportunity for the 'teacher' to have the knowledge re-enforced, and an opportunity to have the process reviewed which often leads to process improvement!

Category two is a no-brainer. You know if there are courses that just have to be sponsored to enable staff to legally fulfil their obligations.

Category three is your source for helping staff to grow beyond their current position and into the next on their career path.

Designing a Personal and Professional Development (PPD) Plan

Based on the assumption that everyone should be doing something, what should that something be? For each staff member his or her manager should:

1. Make sure that the Job or Position Description contains a list of the characteristics one might need to have in order to do the best possible job.
2. Audit the Position Description to ensure that the Key Performance Indicators are clear. (See our How-to Guide on *Preparing Job Descriptions* for more information on how to do this).
3. The time to set up a PPD Plan is at the regular performance review (See our How-to Guide on *Staff Appraisals and the SME* for more information on this).
4. Identify the areas where improvement is needed.
5. Decide whether it is a resource thing (human or capital) or whether it is the person's time/willingness that may represent constraints.
6. If it is the person, insist that they source potential courses they could take that will help bridge the performance gap. Give them a deadline!
7. Check out the selection and make sure you get third party endorsement.
8. Confirm the terms for your support and the costs against your budget.
9. Make a written note of the expectations and agree on the medium for assessing the impact.

To pay or not to pay.

I remember talking to a friend in business about his company's training policy. In summary, his approach was that he basically paid all or part of any training his staff wanted to participate in. I asked the questions and challenged him with the things you are thinking as you read this.

First, doesn't there need to be some application for the training in the job and some consequent value to the business? Second, does everyone necessarily have to improve their skills, I mean in my friend's case some staff were essentially process workers, so why bother? I guess his answer shouldn't surprise you or me:

"Wanting to train or learn or grow is a characteristic of good staff, regardless of their role in my company. I want people working with me that have a sense of purpose and some passion for



something. I don't care if they want to do Origami... as long as it is on their time and they see it through and it gives them a sense of fulfilment, I will support it financially."

The logic is inescapable, and the benefits are clear. I have since encouraged the application of this principle, wherever practical.

When do you pay and how much?

If it is compulsory then the terms are straightforward. In the case where the investment is optional, it is preferable to make the staff member pay and refund the cost to them on successful completion. If it is out of their reach, some obligation to repay the investment should be imposed should their subsequent failure result in financial loss on your part.

How much you pay depends on who is the beneficiary. If the staff member is likely to benefit beyond the potential to enhance their professional performance or indeed beyond their employment with you, they ought to make an appropriate contribution. This can be either a percentage of the cost of the course or even a salary sacrifice - where the course fee makes up a component of their agreed salary.

What is successful completion?

This is the point where a little creativity is needed. Make sure you get the full benefit of their learning. This is what I mean:

- They need to show their performance and their output has improved directly as a consequence of the course.
- They need to prove what they have learnt has been applied.
- They need to prepare a full debrief of the course and its application so that you can assess the value for future staff members who may contemplate the same program.
- They need to share what they have learnt with other staff so that the benefit is maximised.
- They need to make the entire course-work and assignments relevant: assignments should use your company as the subject matter where appropriate.

Over to you now. All our experience has demonstrated that the real beneficiary of a dynamic Personal and Professional Development Program, effectively communicated and diligently applied, is the company that promotes it!

