

Workplace

Three reasons why corporate training fails



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By Sheresa Holmes

“If you think training is expensive, try ignorance.” – management guru Peter Drucker

This quote typically references the fact that issues which arise from avoiding training sometimes cost companies more than the training investment would have been. Even in instances where companies understand the value of training, too often training interventions are unsuccessful or have minimal impact, because they are done to check off a list. This perspective also speaks to the ignorance Drucker references as well.

So, let’s discuss three reasons why corporate training fails.

1. Lack of strategic planning

Since the definition of success is ‘the accomplishment of an aim or purpose’, to claim that a training initiative was successful, one must first determine the desired outcomes and highlight how the outcomes will be measured. Strategic planning is therefore one of the biggest reasons why corporate training fails; because decision makers seldom know how the training being sought should impact their desired organisational outcomes. And worse yet, they have no way to measure the success of the initiative.

When organisations do not link training to their overall strategy, they run the risk of investing time, money and effort in training that may be misaligned to employee skills and needs. Consequently, they may fail to adequately address specific organisational issues, and miss opportunities to develop new capabilities or truly enhance performance.

2. Thinking that education is training

Another major reason why corporate training fails is the mindset that what is merely education, is actually training.

Education provides background knowledge about a particular topic, which means that in essence, to be educated is to be exposed to information. In most instances, organisations give excellent opportunities for this. On the other hand, training is more skills-based and provides an opportunity to practise what has been taught. But different yet is the concept of learning. Learning has been achieved when the individual who has been educated and trained, understands, and can readily apply knowledge gained.

In a scenario where management decides to send an employee to a standard 2-hour session on Understanding Excel, while the individual may have been educated and trained on the topic, chances are, they may not readily understand how to apply the information to their specific role. Perhaps there is a need to create detailed spreadsheets or manipulate functions that may not have been addressed in enough detail during training.

This is why experiential learning is so important; and often, the challenge occurs when training does not work in tandem with



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an environment for learning. Of course, we understand this in the context of technical jobs and skills, but it is often harder to remember for other job types, especially office-based roles.

Based on research by the Centre for Creative Leadership, 70 per cent of learning happens on the job; and only ten per cent is based on information shared and formal training. The other 20 per cent is based on consistent coaching on how to bridge the gap between the two, and allows for greater efficiency when executing one’s functions. When organisations do not ensure that information is retained and applied following training sessions, the probability is higher that the intended change does not occur.

3. No one tells trainees why they are training!

In another scenario, an operations supervisor sees an ad for first aid training and registers four employees to attend because he/she thinks it would be beneficial for them. Similarly, the human resources manager notices inconsistencies in the organisation’s disciplinary procedures across various departments and decides to schedule training on conducting discipline for the company’s supervisors and managers. Employees are then notified about the sessions to occur in one to two weeks’ time - after everything has been coordinated! In most instances, the only information provided is the topic, and date.

It is no wonder that trainees are often disconnected from the session being proposed or delivered. Are there other underlying core issues that should be addressed first? Do employees believe the suggested training is critical? Has management considered their workload or schedule? Have they considered whether the employees are in a mindset to receive the information at the scheduled time? It would be useful to answer these questions ahead of every training needs analysis.

Too often, companies do not include employees in the process when coordinating

training. However, it is critical for management to think of training as the start of a change process; and in order to get the greatest buy in and participation, companies that focus on making the people in the process feel most at ease with the intended change, have the most successful outcomes.

Prior to training and where practicable, management should discuss observations and areas for improvement with staff; and share the intention to conduct training. Involving employees in the process also means getting feedback and buy-in before seeking training proposals and scheduling training dates. The intention would be to frame employees’ minds for what is to come while building ownership and commitment to the training and development process. These steps could reduce the likelihood of disengagement, poor attention, and frustration during the training phase, and encourage the conscious application of information post-training.

Conclusion

Here at the Barbados Employers’ Confederation, we encourage employers to first conduct needs analyses that align to their organisation’s goals; before determining what type of training is required - and for whom. It is our aim to assist in matching that need as best we can to close the gap outlined.

We usually go about this by scheduling a call or meeting to discuss an organisation’s needs in further detail. In these preliminary steps, we are able to assist organisations in avoiding instances where training goals or objectives are ambiguous because “if you think training is expensive, try ignorance.”

For more clarity or assistance planning your upcoming training sessions, feel free to reach out at training@barbadosemployers.com.

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