

The Role of Supervisors in Fostering a Learning Environment

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Each year all types of organizations feel this impact of social and technological changes.



Those that survive and flourish are the ones in which management accepts and adapts to the change. Even though change is often initially rejected and can be painful, it cannot be ignored. Sears, IBM, and several U.S. automakers have made the grave mistake of underestimating the effect of failing to address change. They now struggle to hold on to what is left and regain their lost market shares. Training is one strategy for helping to reestablish a foothold.

Support for training in any organization has to start at the top levels of management. If upper managers do not recognize the need for and support training initiatives, your efforts to design and deliver programs will likely fail. The challenge for frontline supervisors is to develop and follow a strategy for employee development that is visible to upper management and that will enhance their own worth, while adding value to the organization. In the process, they will be able to help their employees evolve to their fullest potential.

Here are six strategies to help supervisors develop their strategy and sell their ideas on training and development to upper management.

1. Become a change agent. By working to stimulate thinking and get people thinking outside the box instead of accepting status quo, supervisors become a more vibrant component of the organization.

2. Conduct a training needs assessment. Outline where you are, where you need to be, resources available, potential barriers, and any other specific areas based on your organizational situation.

3. Research the field of training and development. There are hundreds of books, articles, and training resources published each year. Read as many varied viewpoints as possible in order to get a broad perspective on what training can and cannot do for you, your employees, and your organization. Keep in mind that training is only one possible intervention and not the solution to all issues.

4. Partner with others. Search your organization to identify other supervisory or management members who have training experience and political influence. Meet with them, sell them on your ideas and either seek their advice or join forces with them to advance your efforts.

5. Network throughout your industry. There are many organizations providing training to their employees. Rather than start from scratch, contact related organizations and ask them to share resources. If they do not have current training programs or strategies, a

potential cost/resource-sharing arrangement might be possible between your organization and theirs.

6. Develop an action plan. Answer these questions: (a) Who will do what? (b) What needs to be done? (c) When it must occur? (d) How will you proceed? and (e) Why are you taking specific action? This latter will be vital in selling ideas to upper management.

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