

The Supervisor's Role as Trainer

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More than ever, organizations are being forced to "do more with less." To accomplish that, today's employees are being asked to learn new skills, take on additional responsibilities, and continue to help increase bottom line profit without adding additional expense.

To help accomplish these feats, supervisors will be called on to fill many roles in the workplace. None of these roles is more crucial than that of trainer. By assuming this key function, frontline leaders can have significant impact on the organization.

Your job as trainer and coach starts as soon as an employee becomes part of your team. At that point you must begin to provide guidance and support. You must personally teach or arrange for training which will allow your employee to successfully perform their assigned job tasks.

Many supervisors shy away from training because they feel unprepared or uncomfortable making group presentations and providing one-on-one coaching. Some believe that training is someone else's job. In fact, training is a prime responsibility for supervisors and does not have to be difficult. It is simply a form of performance coaching.

To begin a successful trek as a supervisor/trainer, it is important to recognize what training is NOT. Training is not:

- **A remedy for all performance problems.** The best training in the world will not compensate for an employee who is incapable of or unwilling to perform a task.
- **A means for an employee to perfect task performance.** In an effective training session, your employees should learn the correct way to perform a task, have their questions answered, and have an opportunity to experiment with their knowledge or skill(s). They will hone and perfect their technique on the job when they are given the tools needed and are properly supported by you.
- **A way of compensating for poor supervision.** Training is just another tool in your supervisory toolbox. If you do not get actively involved in training or reinforcing the training received by your employees, you will both fail.
- **Easy.** A successful training session requires forethought and planning. It is not to be taken lightly or done on the spur of the moment as a "quick fix" to a performance issue. If the latter occurs, you can be sure that the result will be failure -- yours, and your employee's.

Now that you know what training is not, let's briefly examine what it IS.

"Training is any formal or informal activity that contributes to an improvement in an employee's knowledge, skill and/or attitude level(s)."

Training is different from *education*, which conjures up images of school classrooms concepts and theories, as opposed to practical application of knowledge. Generally, training is classified as either *formal* or *informal*. Some examples of each follow.

Formal

Classroom presentations
Computer-based training (CBT)
Roleplays
College courses
One-on-one coaching

Informal

One-on-one coaching
Peer coaching
Correspondence courses
Research

No matter which type of training you do, you should not allow the training to be seen as insignificant in content or importance. If your employees perceive that you do not support or believe in the training content or method they will likely follow your lead. Learning or transfer of knowledge takes place only when you show commitment and your employees buy in to the effort.

To accomplish this, be prepared to provide informal one-on-one training to your employees as well as formal classroom instruction. Your effectiveness in accomplishing this will determine your success rate and that of your employee(s).

Some supervisors might ask, "Why train?" There are many answers to that question. Some include:

- Technology is moving at such a fast pace that many employees cannot keep up.
- Globalization, increased access to world markets, and international competition is growing rapidly.
- Supervisors and managers need a broader depth of knowledge to successfully lead a better educated and more diverse workforce.
- The values and beliefs of today's workforce have changed.
- Demographic shifts in the population of the United States, and other countries, have resulted in shrinking pool of qualified entry-level employees, which means more cross-training (training employees to perform multiple workplace tasks) is needed.
- Supervisors are now responsible for helping introduce their new employees to company practices and culture in order to ensure maximum effectiveness and efficiency on the job.

If you are a supervisor in an organization where training is not done regularly and want to enhance the workplace skills of your staff, consider becoming a catalyst for change by championing training. To do this here are some suggestions to help you develop your strategy and sell your ideas to management:

- **Conduct a training needs assessment.** Outline where your employees are from a knowledge and skills perspective, where they need to be, resources available,

potential barriers, and any other specific areas based on your organizational situation.

- **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 employee(s), and your organization. Contact the National ASTD office at www.astd.org for possible information sources and resources.
- **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.
- **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. If there is a local ASTD chapter in your area, that is a good starting point. Check with the National office of ASTD to determine a location near you.
- **Develop an action plan.** Answer these questions: (1) Who will do what? (2) What needs to be done? (3) When it must occur? (4) How will you proceed? (5) Why are you taking specific action? This latter will be vital in selling ideas to upper management.

The bottom line for supervisors is to take responsibility for developing your staff in as many ways as possible. Become a competent and professional trainer so that you can share your knowledge and facilitate learning among employees.

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