

## TRAINING COURSES!

**'That's so yesterday!'** It's a phrase that could have been tailor-made to describe our millenium working environment. Trying to keep pace with the latest developments, ever-changing market positions and commercial challenges means that even today isn't up-to-date enough, skills-wise – we need to be somewhere in the middle of next week, armed with a cross between a computer and a crystal ball.

This being the case, it is generally recognised in business that work is a constant learning curve and we all have to assimilate new concepts, coordinate new product developments and develop new skills in order to keep competitive and stay ahead of the game, me included. So in the spirit of practising what I preach I recently took myself off to attend two training courses. Sadly as it turned out all I achieved was to waste both time and money and I think it is safe to say I learnt very little and was left feeling frustrated and let down. My sense of dissatisfaction was further exacerbated by the fact that I initiated the training because I deperately wanted to learn the new skills which the programme purported to teach. So what went wrong and whose fault was it?

Reflecting back, my experience was probably quite unique because very few training engagements are utter failures - there is usually some measurable good that comes from them. But a truly successful training experience is one where the insightful and instructive far outweighs the meagre and mediocre.

So why do training programmes fail to deliver what they promise and leave management sceptical about their value and usefulness as a learning tool? One of the most common reasons that training falters, is poor selection, both in terms of identifying the course and determining who should attend.

You would be amazed how many times I have been wearing my training hat and had students just shrug their heads when I ask them why they are there. Half the time they seem totally baffled as to why they have been selected to attend - almost as if all their line manager was doing was filling his training quota and budget. This lack of preparation before the course is mirrored in the post-training de-brief which more often than not consists of a throwaway "So, how did the training go?" from manager to employee in the corridor, not really expecting or requiring a reply. But if training is a corporate philosophy and lifestyle and an investment held dear by the leaders of the corporation, and if the atmosphere throughout the organisation is "We want to make available what you need to help you deliver what we need," the training pump is primed for success. And it's a recognised truth that productivity increases in direct proportion to morale.

Another reason that training so often fails to deliver results is because of pace and preparation of or lack of them. Rolling out Microsoft Windows XP in eight months? Train all of the end users by Friday. New Directory Services in six months? Infrastructure training can wait until a couple of weeks before deployment, no problem. So the training is either too fast to be effective or grossly underestimates the time it takes to assimilate the new skills and knowledge required. Either way, it doesn't work.

Another big problem is managers and organisations who embark on training for the sake of it. This is usually motivated by fixed mindsets, following fads and copying what everyone else is doing, being taken in by an inflated sales pitch or making false economies. They did it that way at their old company, the company next door is doing it this way, they're lured by the promise from the sexy, seductive brochure or worse still, the one with the lower prices - whatever. Someone takes the decision that this must be the best way so that is what we will do. And of course this is crazy because no two environments are exactly alike, and neither are any two people so what works for organisation X is not necessarily what is going to work for organisation Y

But the biggest single problem in my experience is that management does not place enough emphasis on ensuring that training is related properly to the work situation and the skills and information learned are effectively transferred. In other words, that there will be some clear and demonstrable return on their investment because lets face it if there is no change why make the investment in the first place? It should be law that before an employee is sent on a training programme there is a contract psychological or otherwise in place whereby they agree that there will be a change in performance, behaviour or attitude when they return to the work situation and that the employer will facilitate the transition. The old saying that what they don't inspect, they don't respect, is never more true than when referring to training. If we don't go to our employees when they return from class and ask what they learnt and what can they do differently how can we expect them to raise the enthusiasm and make the effort on their own?

So what I suggest is this: If we want training to add value, choose the course wisely, make sure the employee wants to attend, understands what they are expected to learn and more importantly what is expected of them post-training, with regards to what they need to do differently and more effectively to ensure that the training course was worthwhile, Secondly: Forget the fads and fancies - you can spot them a mile away with their obvious slogans like "Success Starts With Us!" or 'Give Your Business A Boost!' .....Get real - time to think about training, not just do it! And lastly: Stop seeing training as a crash course to learning. It rarely is - learning is a process that is sequential and builds slowly each step of the way. If you look on it as a quick fix, that crash course might end up literally just that - a bit of a train smash!

