

The Question is "What Do THEY Need?"

by Terry "TJ" Wisner

Training, training, training...After more than a quarter century in the human performance improvement business, I still am amazed by the number of managers that believe training is the solution to all their problems. Recently a survey indicated that over 82% of managers that responded indicated their people need training, or the company would not reach its targets. As a speaker and seminar leader, one would think those results would be encouraging. To a point, they are. However, there are many other variables that might be causing a person's performance to be less than desired.

One of the first questions I ask of people requesting my services is; "What do they need to improve their performance?" Most often, they reply the organization needs some customer service training, teambuilding, or leadership development. Then I ask: "Why?" The response to this question usually includes something like; "The leadership team thinks it's important or that they asked a few people and that is what they said they needed."

Then again I ask: "Why?" Do you see a pattern here? How do I know what they need? Very often, managers (and that includes HR and Training Managers) have failed to complete a valid training needs assessment. Whether formal or informal, an assessment of training and developmental needs must be completed. (Let me interject here: *The CPO Institute* doesn't sell any assessment tools)

The results from a high quality needs analysis will describe the gap between the current performance and the desired performance. What's next? Once the needs have been identified, then the type of training delivery must be selected. The recent stampede to computer based training (CBT) and distance learning (DL) has slowed somewhat. As more companies and organizations experience unsatisfactory results, CBT and DL are losing some of their luster. While they most often offer a lower cost solution to meet the training need, CBT and DL often fail to deliver any positive change in performance.

For the record, if a training needs analysis has not been accomplished and measurements have not been established, the selection of the type of training is not very important. In other words, if you don't have a clear picture of where you are, or where you are going, any bus will take you there. The more specific the training needs analysis is and the more complete the training plan is, the more clearly defined the training outcomes are, the more successful the training initiative will be.

Where can I get great training?

That being said, great classroom training is difficult to find. Many people think they are "trainers" because they believe they have the ability to entertain an audience and receive good reviews from the smiley face feedback sheets. Fact is there are few great trainers that can truly help individuals close the gap between current and desired performance. Organizations need to seek out the truly professional trainers, whether within or outside their organization.

Human performance improvement is not about flashy presentation, slick interactive computer program, glossy text books, or dynamic speaking. It's all about "what they need" to improve their performance and getting it for them.

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