

■ MID-IOWA BUSINESS

Employee training done right (Part II)

Last month, we began discussing guidelines for successfully training employees. These included:

- Ensuring that training is targeted for specific shortcomings or potential opportunities in the organization's performance.
- Using training to address deficiencies in skills rather than motivation.
- Identifying the specific outcomes desired from the training.

This month, I'd like to explore the unique considerations to be made when designing and delivering training for adults.

During elementary school, we accepted most of what our teachers taught us as relevant, with only an occasional "I'll never use this!" These complaints likely increased in frequency throughout our middle school and high school years.

By the time we're adults, we've long concluded that the world contains much more knowledge than can be stuffed into our heads in the small amount of time left over in our busy days for education. Thus, adult learners have different needs and learn in different ways than their younger counterparts. Understanding these needs and differences are



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keys if your organization is to optimize its training investment.

First, in order for adults to be motivated to learn, they must understand and clearly see the relevancy and practicality of the desired new knowledge, prior to attending. Thus, it is beneficial to share the reasoning and the desired outcomes with adult students before training begins. The more personalized this discussion, the better.

This explains why it is advantageous for leaders to train their own people. Nothing speaks more clearly to the importance of a lesson than a manager investing

his or her own time to teach it. While outside resources can be extremely helpful in developing effective lesson plans for adults, actual delivery is best accomplished by an organization's leaders. This is a situation where intent matters more than technique. In other words, the strong message sent by leaders' involvement outweighs their lack of experience as professional trainers.

Adult learners want and need to participate in, and occasionally lead, their own self-discovery. Sensory exercises, offered in a safe, respectful environment are required to result in "Aha!" moments. Traditional learning techniques, such as reading and listening to a lecturer, should be discouraged in favor of creatively doing a lesson. This is especially important since, unlike their elementary counterparts, a significant portion of an adult student population may enter the training with negative experiences and perceptions regarding formal education. Some may struggle with basic reading skills. Others may be attending in their non-native language. In short, death by PowerPoint should be strictly avoided.

After new knowledge is introduced to adults, retention techniques are critical to ensure that it is not lost. Reinforcement,

both positive and negative, is required for the new knowledge to be transferred into action. Management almost always undercommunicates its most important messages. As such, leaders should take advantage of all communication mechanisms available, both formal and informal to reiterate the importance of the new skills, the key fundamentals and the expectations for application.

Finally, and most importantly, the ability to transfer and apply the new knowledge to real-world settings outside the classroom must be present for true learning to occur. Thus, training should occur immediately prior to on-the-job application opportunities. Also, training should be scoped in terms of breadth so employees can be reasonably monitored and held accountable for correctly applying their new-found knowledge.

Investing in employees via effectively conceived, implemented and applied training is among the most strategic decisions a company can make. This is because a high-performing workforce represents one of the most difficult assets for your competitors to duplicate.

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■ AREA BUSINESS IN BRIEF

ISU students urged to enter business contest

Iowa university students have until Friday, Dec. 12 to enter the New Business Plan competition sponsored by Pappajohn Center for Entrepreneurship.

The contest is open to any Iowa university or college student/team interested in starting a business, according to Judi Eheles, assistant director of programs at the Iowa State University Pappajohn Center.

Finalists compete for three \$5,000 cash awards, and free business counseling is offered to those who complete and return the "intent to compete" form.

Applications and competition guidelines are available at www.isu.pjcenter.org/programs/newventure.

For information, call (515) 296-6532.

Hubbard corn seminar is Dec. 4

D and B Agro-Systems of Hubbard will sponsor a Corn Drying Seminar beginning at 8:45 a.m. Thursday, Dec. 4, at the Quality Inn and Suites Starlite Conference Center, 2601 E. 13th St., in Ames. Learn about the latest technology in handling corn. The seminar will include workshop presentations by Brock, Intelliair, Mathews Company and Shivvers. Keynote speaker Dallas Landt, of R. J. O'Brien, will address the grain markets and worldwide events affecting farmers. Cost is \$15 per person, with registration due Friday, Nov. 21.

To sign up for the seminar, download the flyer at www.dandbsystems.com or call (800) 931-9382.

Union Pacific makes railroad improvements

Motorists will spend less time at crossings waiting for trains to pass as a result of \$7 million in track improvements under way by Union Pacific Railroad to its Central Iowa line that serves several communities including Jewell, Webster City and Eagle Grove. The track improvements also will create smoother crossing surfaces for motorists along the 56 miles where the projects are taking place between Ames and Goldfield.

Upon completion, crews will have removed and installed 55,800 ties, replaced 2,000 feet of rail in a curve near Webster City, spread 22,400 tons of rock ballast to ensure a stable roadbed and replaced the road sur-

faces at 25 crossings. The road surfaces were renewed between May and early October. Work began on the other projects Oct. 29 and was scheduled for completion on Dec. 1.

During 2008, Union Pacific plans to invest a total of \$3.1 billion for capital projects that include \$1.6 billion earmarked to strengthen the track infrastructure across its more than 32,300-mile system. This extensive investment in the railroad's track helps ensure Union Pacific has the ability to offer quality, safe and cost-effective service to meet its customers' current and future transportation needs.

From 2003 to 2007, Union Pacific has invested \$587 million for capital projects in Iowa, with \$127 million spent in 2007. During 2008, Union Pacific plans to devote \$85 million for capital projects in Iowa.