

Should You Fire Your Training Department?

6 Criteria to Evaluate the Effectiveness of Your Learning Department

By Sam Palazzolo

Nothing contributes more to your organization's profits or losses than your employees. Having the right employee in the right position at the right time executing the right processes is a recipe for success. However, few managers are fortunate to have this recipe, consistently, in their organizations, so they rely upon the learning department to train employees for success. Unfortunately, the guidance these employees receive from the learning department often causes them to fail because the training doesn't provide tangible or measurable results.

The American Society of Training and Development's "Certified Professional in Learning and Performance" (CPLP) recommends taking a proactive stance when it comes to developing, delivering and following up on training. And this proactive stance should be taken by learning departments, where organizational training needs are anticipated and identified, then delivered accordingly. If you question your learning department's training contribution to your profit picture, use the following six proactive criteria to evaluate their effectiveness.

1. **Strategic** - Training initiatives should be developed with the organization's strategies and objectives in mind. Too often, training departments prepare and present material that is a "current" or "hot" topic instead of what is imperative to achieving the organization's business goals. Your learning professionals should take an active role to assist leadership by showing the positive impact training will have on the organization as a whole. Training will continually improve the organization's ability to compete in its market and it's the most effective means of leveraging the organization's knowledge and talent. A shift in learning department employees from "trainers" to "consultants" or "trusted advisors" is needed.
2. **Professionalism** - The training professionals of the future will be able to perform with a high level of preparation and personalization. Customization is king when it comes to preparing training for the organizational audience. "Canned" training - presentations pulled off of the shelf or those not updated for the current organizational goals - will not suffice in the current "change in a minute" or "around every corner" business climate of the modern workplace. With this in mind, personalization and customization will set your learning department's training apart and deliver higher value to your organization.
3. **Implementation/Sustained Process** - Training is just presentation for the sake of presenting if the material is never implemented. Worse yet, if training is implemented with a "when times are good" mentality or without a schedule, it will never be sustained. When times become "not good," the natural tendency will be to revert back to the original process of how things were done in the past. The goal of training is to be able to execute in good times as well as tough times. Therefore, establish continuous training goals for the greater good of the organization, regardless of economic swings. Implementation works best when the top of the organization supports the learning department's

continuous training, and support from the top substantially increases the likelihood that the process will be sustained. Training objectives should be measured periodically to ensure satisfactory progress or regress. If progress slows, identifying modifications in the original process will provide further areas of improvement.

4. Responsibility - The "R" word - responsibility is rarely considered in learning departments when it comes to training efforts. Instead, learning departments often cast blame on less-than- successful training initiatives in the other departments within the organization. Inevitably, the other departments similarly shed this blame by identifying one another as the reason success wasn't achieved. Regardless of who's to blame, if the organization's results were less-than anticipated, the training department must take responsibility for the initiatives they present. A key part of this responsibility is properly developing effective and accurate metrics and measurement tools to track and report the value to the organization. Once value has been presented, the responsibility is still upon the learning department's shoulders to execute accordingly.

5. Learning - Learning isn't a one-time event! Instead, consider it a process in need of continuous improvement. Instilling this learning process in every part of the organization is key to longevity and success. No two departments learn the same way, and no two leaders will request the same methods. The training team must work in sync with the leadership team to ensure the proper learning methodologies are identified and delivered for maximum return.

6. Proactive - Obviously it pays to be as proactive as possible, but even more, it's a competitive advantage! Learning departments must work hand-in-hand with organization leadership so they know exactly where their training destinations should be. Again, the more proactive learning departments can be when assessing and identifying what training will have the greatest economic value for the organization, the better. In order to do so, leaders within the learning department must take a proactive stance when it comes to the development and delivering of the training. Training does not end when the sessions conclude either. Learning departments should review the training goals, which were established at the outset, and measure whether or not they are being met. If they are, consider it "Mission Accomplished" and if they are not, learning departments should analyze where specifically the training fell short of accomplishing the desired goals. Then a new training message should be delivered and implemented. Thereafter, and periodically after installation, the learning department should continue to measure and compare for desired results.

Properly anticipating the best training methodologies and delivering them in sync with the organization's goals is paramount for success. This success can be measured by how well your training department performs the six steps identified above.

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