

Getting The Most From Your Training Dollars

By Judith Filek — President,
Impact Communications, Inc.

Reinforcing training should be a priority. After all, you have undoubtedly invested thousands of dollars to bring someone into your organization and to take people out of the field. So what are the things you can do as a manager to insure an R.O.I.?

Planning is the first step. When you think about hiring an outside consultant, do not act on impulse. Consider these questions:

- What are the desired outcomes and key results I am looking for? How will they help this organization move closer to the organization's stated goals?
- Can I put words around our current problems? What is now going on that leads me to consider spending money on training?
- Do I have the time to help the consultant understand our organization? Can I arrange for the consultant to interview people? Do I have information on our products or services to give to the consultant?
- Am I able to explain the organizational structure?
- Why do I know about this consultant? Do I have recommendations? Why am I considering this particular person?
- Have I seen the consultant's work? Has anyone else seen it?

The second step is to inform and communicate expectations to the outside consultant. Consultants won't know what you want unless you communicate your expectations clearly. Even if people have worked with you for a long time, it's not their job to figure out what you want. If you are expecting the program to be customized to your organization's issues, be sure to communicate that to the consultant.

Make sure to clearly explain the problems in your organization and the outcomes you expect. Ask for input from the consultant. Refine and finalize your plan together. Set short and long term goals for any training you want delivered.

Objectively observe the training. You should base your observations on the outcomes you determined during the planning stage. If you are too busy to observe, have someone else do it. If possible, participate in the class.

- Are the goals and objectives clearly stated at the beginning?
- Are the exercises relevant to the goals and objectives?
- Have the objectives been met at the end of the program?
- Is the consultant energetic, engaging, amusing?
- What's the level of buy-in from participants?
- What are participants saying over break?
- What are the evaluations saying?

After the training, reinforce the concepts.

Model the principles learned. There is nothing like walking the talk. It is the strongest message that you can send to your staff. If the concepts are a priority to you, they will become a priority to your staff. What you say should always match what you do. It should be a given that after the training everyone will set goals, including you. Everyone should actively seek feedback, including you.

- Decide which behaviors you need to change or build on for appropriate role modeling.
- Let your team advise you. It's much easier to be in this process together. It will help to strengthen the team.

Ask the consultant to help you to reinforce the skills.

Do a follow-up program. Have the consultant send out monthly reminders. Ask for a bibliography. Purchase recommended books or tapes and pass them around. Ask that the consultant be available for questions concerning the issues identified. Be sure to share how the consultant will continue to help with your staff.

People will continue to do what they have always done, unless someone tells them differently. When you train people, you offer them new insights and new ways for doing things. Training should be a priority in your organization, and it should stick.

Impact Communications, Inc. consults with individuals and businesses to improve their face-to-face and over the phone communication skills. It is not what you know but how you communicate it that makes a difference. To reach us, phone (847) 438-4480 or contact our web site, www.ImpactCommunicationsInc.com.