TRAINING TODAY

SPRING 2007

CHICAGOLAND CHAPTER ASTD WORKPLACE LEARNING & PERFORMANCE

A MAGAZINE FOR WORKPLACE LEARNING AND PERFORMANCE PROFESSIONALS IN THE CHICAGOLAND AREA

Letter from the Editor

A Flurry of Training Activity

Have you seen an increase in training activity lately? The reason I ask is that I have seen consulting projects as well as training jobs posted lately—a burst of activity. I hope that is a good sign, that companies' training budgets are approved and they are comfortable investing in people.

Who is this person giving her opinion on the Chicago training job market, anyway? You may notice a new name associated with Editor in this issue. That is because this is my first issue in this role. I have been a board member in the past and continue to direct the Sales Training Forum for CCASTD. My vision for this newsletter is to maintain the quality that has been established over the years. It is also to include articles of interest to all the members of CCASTD. This includes the consultant/vendors, the corporate trainers and leaders and the education constituents. I will be looking for articles for future issues from everyone. If you have an idea or best practice you want to share, please send it my way. Article guidelines are posted on the web site.

This issue will include some topics I hope will be of interest to you. Jim Graham, VP Training and Development, RR Donnelley, has contributed an article on Getting Leadership Support for Training. As trainers (whether internal or external), we are all salespeople. We sell ideas up in the organization to gain support, and we sell

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ideas to participants that we believe will help them solve problems. Right? Jim has some great ideas on how to gain support and sell those ideas up. He led a Sales Training Forum session in February on this topic that was lively and informative.

Both internal and external consultants can learn something from the Drake Resource Group article on working effectively with SMEs. There are some tips on how to manage a SME relationship for the benefit of the project outcome.

Dan Walker, from the Marcomm Store, helps us with how to leverage audio recordings as a method to reinforce our training efforts. He has some great ideas on how to make podcasts interesting—not just factual, but easy to listen to. And how to use audio recordings such as podcasts to help reinforce the training messaging.

Ben Ball from Dechert-Hampe discusses the importance of training staying close to the business and understanding the customer in order to create training that is relevant to the organization. For anyone who has ever been "too busy" to get out and see how people are applying training to their work, this article is for you. We all need reminding of this from time to time.

For the consulting, solution-provider audience, Steve Bistritz shares lessons and advice for people wanting to cut the ties and go the independent route. There are very practical ideas on building a business and attracting clients, based on his experiences starting his own business, Learning Solutions International.

Many thanks to the contributors to this issue. My hope for the reader is that you find an idea or two you can put into practice.

Renie McClay
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Getting Leadership Support

by Jim Graham

Jim Graham, Vice President of Training and Development at RR Donnelley, recently spoke at a Sales Training Forum session and worked with sales guru Neal Rackham. Here are some of the concepts he communicated.

There is no magic pill for persuading senior leadership to support your training initiatives! It's a tough, uphill battle, where you are competing for time, tight budget dollars, potential outsourcing, reductions, restructuring, cost controls, and many more worthy projects. Other constituents are just as enthusiastic and eager as you are to get the same support. So here are a few best practices for gaining that support for your projects.

Credibility

Let's start with **credibility**. As the old saying goes, "sometimes you've got it, and sometimes you don't." In getting support from senior management, you must have it! This is not negotiable; you cannot get support for your project without having credibility!

How do you get it? First, you earn it through years of service to the company. You rise through the ranks, become successful in sales or sales management, earn a reputation for effectiveness, take on challenging initiatives, and succeed. Basically, *your reputation precedes you*. Great if you've got it. But it is tough if you don't.

In today's world, with mergers, acquisitions, downsizing, and rightsizing, many of us don't have years of experience to support our position. Perhaps the VP of sales, who supported you, has now left the company and your champion is no more. So credibility can be hard to come by.

What is credibility? Credibility is doing what you say you will do, when you say you will do it. It is your track record of performance. How quickly and professionally have you responded to each request? How successful have your projects been? How visible? Who knows about your past performance successes? Can you or someone who has credibility summarize your successes to impress a decision maker?

One way to gain this credibility is to obtain the support of others who have it. You can't gain it alone; you must get help and support. You gain credibility for your project by the associations you have with those who are seen as credible. The people who coach and support you must be credible, even if you are still earning your stripes. They can actively support you via e-mail recommendations or in hallway conversations (yes, those conversations with the right people do influence decisions), or attend a presentation and support you with their presence. They may coach you behind the scenes (the invisible coach). But what they do and how you use their credibility is very important. The higher in your organization this person is the better!

Sell It

How do you develop that winning presentation and what does it contain? There is no one right way, but there are some elements that must be considered. The list below may help if you have not done this before. Even if you have, it might be worth a quick review of the fundamentals:

- Know your audience and how it likes to receive information. (If you don't know, ask an executive assistant, or get coaching.)
- Provide that executive summary, which should include answers to:
    - o WHY are we doing this now?
    - o WHAT impact will this have on the growth and development of participants?
    - o WHAT is the change outcome that will make a difference?
    - o WHAT are the costs? (Don't try to hide this at the end, as most people do with proposals; hit it up front, but then explain why.)

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   - o WHAT time will this save? (Almost any project worth its salt will speed the learning process by reducing learner time.)
   - o HOW much cost will the project reduce? (For example, switching from classroom to e-learning will reduce travel, classroom expense, trainer hours, lost time from the field, and more.)
   - o WHO, other than yourself, is sponsoring?
   - o HOW long is the development time? (Give yourself some flexibility here, no matter what your developers or external suppliers are telling you.)
   - o WHEN will it be implemented?
- Always underpromise and overdeliver.
- Keep it short. Brevity is one of the keys to success.
- Bring the backup data. Don't get surprised with a question you can't answer. (This is like a sales call or an attorney preparing for a case; anticipate what your audience will want to know and questions they may ask.)
- Practice, Practice, Practice. Don't be fooled by what might seem to be an informal situation. Even if you are not presenting via PowerPoint, be thoroughly prepared. In many cases, you have only one time to make a good impression. Even if you know your audience, don't be too casual.
- PowerPoint slides can be a great way to present, if done right. Make it clear and concise. (Avoid the putting 80% of what you say on the slide! Make it 20% on the slide, bullet points only, and talk about the rest.)
- Schedule enough time for the meeting, and avoid circumstances where they are preparing for a board meeting, budgets, and/or the busy times in your organization. (Again, an executive assistant can give you insight here.)
- Be enthusiastic but rational; they probably will be less excited about your project than you are, but your job is to get them excited.
- Remember your objective is to get the commitment; once you do, leave. Don't get caught up in trying to explain more just because you think they should know. Once you get the signature, grab it and run.

If you have never sold as part of your career, consider getting trained in selling. Selling is a skill, and practicing the selling mindset and behaviors can help.

Progress Updates
As part of your project proposal, you should plan to provide feedback on progress and demonstrate, within a reasonable period of time, that the dollars invested were invested wisely.

In order to get funding from senior management for your next project, you must provide progress reports. These should be done at least annually, or even better, quarterly, to apprise the leadership team of your success and accomplishments. Again, consider your audience. They don't need length or depth; they need a brief synopsis of accomplishments and measures.

Tips for Success:

- Start with company or organization priorities and goals.
- Identify the training that is required to achieve those goals.
- List all stakeholders (those who stand to benefit from successful training implementation) in the success of the training.
- Create a plan to engage each stakeholder and explain how the training will support their success.
- Ask what the organization's definition of success is.
- Design the training to achieve their definition of success and the learning objectives that would ensure that the organization's goals can be achieved.
- Don't waste time and money on projects that you want instead of what the key managers are requiring.
- Start a year ahead to obtain budget funds for key projects.
- Work with the managers who have the money to pay for the training they want.
- Put together a solid business case for the training.
- Don't be disappointed when they say no. They are often choosing between sales "feet on the street" and training (they make money on sales; in their eyes, training is an expense instead of an investment).
- Keep informed of the state of the business; choose your timing (when they have money to spend) and word requests very carefully.
- If there is no money—be creative. Think of ways to provide the information and skill practice without spending a lot of money on learning tools, internal coaches, subject matter expert panels, etc. Don't give up!
- Always keep open communications regarding status of projects, needs of management and success celebrations with management and stakeholders.

So what does Utopia look like? How will you know when you are getting leadership support for initiatives?

- You have a large budget and support for training.
- Senior management introduces programs and checks for application of new skills.
- Management asks for more training and tells you they will fund the training if the dollars are not available.
- Training is highlighted often in the company newsletter.
- Senior managers attend and stop in on training sessions often.
- Subject matter experts make it a priority to be available for design, review, and delivery of training programs.

Utopia is good, right? The reality is, getting and keeping support is often challenging. Leaders in the organization change. The process of gaining and keeping support never stops.

Jim Graham is Vice President of Training and Development at RR Donnelley. He was a contributor to Sales Training Solutions, published in November, 2006. Jim started his sales career in the pharmaceutical industry, held previous positions, worked for IAA in Chicago, Jostens Learning in San Diego, joined Huthwaite in Virginia, and worked with Neil Rackham. He returned to the printing industry with Moore Corporation and assumed responsibility for global training with Moore Wallace, and, in 2004, with RR Donnelley.

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So You Think You Want to Become a Consultant…

by Stephen J. Bistritz, Ed.D

After spending nearly 28 years with IBM and another eight years with a sales training and consulting company, five years ago I decided to start my own sales training and consulting business. What follows is a list of 20 activities that will assist you in getting started as a consultant in your own business.

1. Build a large network of people who know about you and your business. Work the network by trying to help those within your network with their products and services.

2. Constantly follow up with people in your network. I can't tell you how many times I will follow up with someone and find out that they are in the midst of a project (or just about to start a project) where they could use my help and my random phone call became very timely!

3. Keep in touch with people in your network via a newsletter that is distributed on a regular basis. Continuously expand your database of people who receive your newsletter.

4. Try to delight every client and develop references who are willing to speak about you and vouch for the credibility, integrity, and quality of your work.

5. Make sure you have a high-quality Web site that is easy to navigate. Although some people would say you don't need a Web site, I have found it invaluable as a source of credibility and information. Provide something for no charge from your Web site (I have a number of articles that I've had published in a variety of journals); this gives people a reason to return to your site. In addition, the first thing many large companies will ask is: What is your Web site address?

6. Build high-quality products and services, using solution providers that have that type of development work as their core competency. For example, given my lack of expertise in PowerPoint, I work with someone who is proficient in both Microsoft Word and PowerPoint. I also used experts to develop my Web site—of course, you can always use a canned program–but why not get people who have that as their core competency to develop it for you? In the long run, it will cost you less, you'll get far better results, and it's also a business expense.

7. Continuously build your brand. Use your Web site to develop and expose your brand so that people recognize you and begin to identify to your brand.

8. Try to develop some type of intellectual property that can be used by multiple clients. I had that objective from the time I started my business. Again, make certain that the IP is of the highest quality, totally error-free, and produced by people who have an "eye for quality." You want your product to be seen in the best possible light; remember, you only have one chance to make a first good impression. If you develop your own intellectual property, you need to have specific copyright information ascribed to your company on every page, slide, and other piece of material–no exceptions!

9. Continuously "bounce" ideas off other people. Get reactions from people you trust and people you know who have a good eye for things that will work well in the field. Don't always go to people who will give you the answer you like or who will tell you what they think you want to hear. Go to those who will give your ideas more scrutiny and who will do a more thorough job of vetting your work.

10. Be responsive to people—to a fault. I learned this in my job as the developer of content for a major brand of sales training offerings. The CEO of a very small sales training and consulting company taught me to always adhere to deadlines, to consistently delight every prospect and client, and to constantly strive to meet each customer's expectations.

11. No matter how many times people say no, never stop selling. I had a prospect come to my Exhibit Booth at a conference who began the conversation by saying she didn't think she could have me deliver any instructor-led training at her company because they were not willing to take salespeople out of the field for even a one-day workshop. After our 45-minute discussion, she asked me for a price to deliver my one-day SellXL workshop to 300 of her company's salespeople.

12. Never stop promoting yourself or your brand—in a positive and nonthreatening way. Here's an example: Every year for the past four years, I worked with one client and developed some aspect of their annual training event. During those four years, I reminded the client of my workshop on selling to executives (SellXL), even though it didn't look as if there would be an opportunity to deliver the workshop in that company. The company was subsequently purchased, and my client contact was able to assume a similar position in the new organization (planning their annual sales meeting). The new company was planning to conduct a large sales meeting and my friend was asked to coordinate the meeting. Three months later, after assuming that the meeting would consist of product training and a recognition event, my client contact was asked the following question by an executive in the new company: What type of sales training are you planning to conduct during

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that three-day meeting? In a panic he came to me, asking me if I could deliver my one-day SellXL workshop to 300 salespeople at their conference in Phoenix. In May 2006, using four instructors over a two-day period, we were able to deliver the workshop to 300 salespeople!

13. Be totally organized in every aspect of your business. This is extremely important if you are the only person in your business (or even if you have a small staff). You have to create simple but viable systems.

14. Try to separate work from your other interests. My office is on the lower level of my house (one level below our main living level) and I go to my office only to work. While my office is close, it's also off-limits (and closed) most of the weekend. There are occasional exceptions to that rule; however, they don't represent the norm.

15. Always act with the highest level of integrity. I once had an IBM executive tell me that "Integrity can be defined as what you will ultimately do, even when no one is looking."

16. Make certain you don't compromise copyrighted information. Always give attribution to work created by other people, particularly if you adapt or extract an idea or concept from their work. Seek their permission to include the content in your work, always giving them attribution.

17. Always be consistent and fair in the pricing of your products and services. There's not much more to say here; however, make certain you always deliver value that far exceeds your price; that way you'll always get return assignments.

18. Treat all people the way you want to be treated, and never burn any bridges. There have been many times when it would have been easy for me to have the last word in a situation; however, I can't tell you how many times I have decided to make a friend rather than create an enemy. Ultimately, that decision has often generated future business for me.

19. Be persistent but always professional in your follow-up of your accounts receivables. This is, for me, the worst part of my job. However, there are ways to mitigate problems in this area. For example, whenever I get a new client assignment, I always ask my contact person the name of the person in their organization who will be responsible for paying my invoices. I contact that person far in advance to make certain I furnish them with the information they need to pay my invoices. Doing this on the front end often reduces the time it takes for the client to pay my invoices.

20. Make certain you incorporate your firm early in the process. This eliminates many problems, especially in dealing with large organizations. Most large companies like to do business with other corporations rather than with individuals who are not incorporated. It's also better for you to be incorporated, from accounting, legal, and professional perspectives.

I hope some of the above tips will help you as you begin your journey down the path of becoming a consultant. I can only tell you that, for me, these past five years in my own business have been the best business years of my life, and I say that from multiple perspectives. They have been extremely rewarding from a financial perspective, but more important, they have also been very rewarding from a personal perspective. I get to select the projects I want to work on, don't report or answer to anyone, and don't have to go to meetings, unless I schedule them. For me, life as a consultant is simply great!

Dr. Steve Bistritz brings nearly four decades of high-technology sales, sales management and training management experience in helping companies ranging from start-ups to established global leaders. He is a published author and lecturer in the field of sales, sales management, and selling to senior executives.

Steve spent more than 27 years with IBM in a number of sales and training management positions.

He is currently President of his own sales training and consulting company, Learning Solutions International, located in Atlanta. He can be contacted through his website, www.sellxl.com.

From Manuals to Mobile Learning: Timeless Skills to Practice

by Sue Drake

Being in the learning and workplace performance arena for more than 20 years (and counting), I've worn many hats and have seen lots of change. My experience in corporate training started with workshops with big manuals, lots of overheads and systems with green screens. In more recent years, things got "GUI-er," with new graphical user interfaces and slicker overheads using graphics. Then, learning went online with audio, graphics, and animation. Now there are podcasts, webcasts, gaming techniques, and just-in-time thin slices of content.

Terminology and roles have changed too. Gone are the days of simply developing training. More recently, there are learning and workplace performance consultants. Even with all of the change, some things remain constant—things like deadlines, project plans, dealing with changing technology, and working with Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) to gather and create engaging content.

In the most general sense, we are (and always have been) a specialized type of consultant. According to Peter Block, author of Flawless Consulting, a consultant is "a person in a position to have some influence over an individual, a group, or an organization, but who has no direct power to make changes or implement programs."

Being in this changing business space, I always look for best practices and

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timeless success factors to leverage. One such timeless success factor is having outstanding consulting skills. With the help of two colleagues, I've summarized the tried and true elements of being a successful consultant. Regardless of your affiliation as a consultant (internal or external) or the title given, the following Seven Cs model will help you to consult with excellence.

The Seven Cs of Consulting:

1. **Competence** is at the core of this model. Technical skills and history of success usually drive the request for your involvement.

2. **Compassionate.** Cultivate and maintain key relationships with clients and team members. Become part of the "we" and not the "outside" expert. Integrate with the team seamlessly.

3. **Comprehensive.** Develop an approach or solution with a systemic mindset. Balance short-term versus long-term impact and measure success. Don't offer only a bandaid, offer strategies and solutions that address root causes.

4. **Change-ready.** Be prepared to maneuver through challenges, both the anticipated and unanticipated ones. Develop contingency plans and involve key stakeholders throughout the process.

5. **Confident.** Demonstrate your faith in your contributions. Speak from your experiences, use your role (directly or indirectly) to influence others, and have the courage to take appropriate risks with the intention of achieving greater results (i.e., state the unspoken issue, challenge with questions).

6. **Coach.** Facilitate the client's development of the most effective approach and/or solution in order to build his/her ownership and long-term commitment. Know that it's not about you being THE expert; it's about you using your expertise to encourage others to think differently, reflect, and grow.

7. **Client-focused.** Always see the client (internal or external) as unique and as a valued resource. Ultimately, it is the client who will make the final decisions; your ability to "walk in the client's shoes" will directly impact your success as a key influencer in the decision-making process.

In addition, leveraging the Seven Cs of Consulting, another component in successful consulting engagements is working effectively with Subject Matter Experts. Working with SMEs, however, can be a double-edged sword. Because they are the experts, they are often overbooked and overwhelmed with existing duties. Adding the subject matter expert role to their already-overloaded project plate could lead to challenges.

To help reduce some of the challenges, use the following **REAL** strategies for working with **SMEs**:

Relationships are key. Establish and maintain a friendly and professional relationship with SMEs. Find common ground. Be courteous, respectful, and thankful for their time.

Explain your role and expertise. Spend some time discussing your credentials, contributions to the project's success, and your area of expertise.

Articulate SME impact. Describe the role of a subject matter expert and the impact that the SME can have on the success of the project. Point out that the end product is enhanced when the details are accurate, precise, and reflect best practices; only the SME can guarantee that level of excellence.

Line up an initial meeting. Arrange an initial, fact-gathering meeting with the SME—preferably in person. The purpose of the meeting is twofold:

- To establish an effective working relationship with the SME—Discuss work-related preferences, such as the SME's preferred method of contact (by phone, by e-mail, or in person).

- To gather information—Bring a comprehensive list of questions to the meeting. At the end of the meeting, ask if there is anything else you need to know.

Summarize what you heard. After the initial fact-finding meeting (as well as after subsequent meetings), summarize in writing all learning points, future SME contact commitments, and any project deadlines requiring SME involvement. Share the meeting minutes with the SME and other appropriate parties.

Maintain regular contact. Strive to maintain regular contact with the SME, even if only for a brief moment. Continue to build the relationship as the project progresses.

Elect a backup. From time to time, priorities change, as do project resources. Have a backup SME in mind in the event of unforeseen circumstances.

In addition to the points already mentioned, an overriding strategy to help guarantee a successful project with any SME is **appreciation**. Showing appreciation and respect for the SME's unique expertise and talent goes a long way. Expressing appreciation for the SME's contributions will strengthen the relationship and can make the work more fun.

As a consultant and a learning professional, you are challenged daily to define what your role is and is not, to influence outcomes sometimes without direct power, and to leverage ever-changing technology. Each day continues to bring challenges and opportunities for growth. These are the moments to embrace and to demonstrate your excellence.

No matter what the future brings—new technology, new terminology or new resources—the Seven Cs and tips for working with SMEs will remain timeless and effective. Sometimes the more things change, the more they stay the same.

My thanks to Sophia Weibel and Keith Troemner for their help in formulating the Seven Cs of Consulting and the tips for working with SMEs.

After more than 20 years in the corporate education arena, Sue Drake founded Drake Resource Group, Inc., in 1994. Drake is a business and learning consulting firm serving Fortune 100, 500 and 1,000 clients. Sue's leadership style attracts the talent that keeps Drake Resource Group growing and expanding its repertoire. As a champion of lifelong learning, Sue brings a wealth of experience to both her clients and her internal team. Sue is a member of The American Society of Training and Development (both local and national organizations), she belongs to the Society for Technical Communication and was recently recognized as one of the top 50 diversity-owned businesses in Illinois. For more information about Drake Resource Group, go to www.DrakeRG.com, or call Sue at (847) 540-0655.

Podcasting for Training Reinforcement

by Dan Walker

A recent article in *The Wall Street Journal* (10/25/06) caught my eye. It was titled "iPods: Corporate America's New Training and Communications Tool." As the title implies, its focus was on how iPods and similar personal audio playback devices are becoming more popular as a corporate tool with which to train and communicate with employees. The article cited companies such as Seimens and Capital One Financial, which use the iPods to bring their team members sales and training updates. There's even a restaurant chain that uses the devices to train their cooks to prepare food while they work! So enamored of the podcast platform are these and an ever-growing list of companies that they're willing to spend thousands of dollars to equip their people with Apple's popular iPods.

And maybe you've heard the recent news that Microsoft and Ford have entered into an agreement to equip some models with new technology that will turn your car into a true office on wheels. Dubbed Ford Sync, the system uses Microsoft's Auto software and among its many features is one that allows drivers to use voice commands or steering wheel buttons to play training segments (or music) stored on iPods and Microsoft's Zune as well as other MP3 players and even USB flash drives.

TIP: You might start looking in your basement for space next to your old LPs, 8-tracks, and cassette tapes for a place to store those soon-to-be-relic CDs.

What the article didn't spend enough time on, though, is a point that should appeal to the sense of fiscal responsibility in all of us: training reinforcement. Think about it. So much time is spent in the development of just exactly the right training message. Now, think about the money invested in that curriculum from development to delivery. And what's the number-one frustration for trainers? Retention, or the lack thereof. Despite your best efforts as a training professional, a good percentage of what you've spent so much time, effort, and money teaching your team is soon forgotten. So when you consider the podcast as a tool to keep your message top-of-mind, it starts to make a lot of sense. It's a fairly new and definitely hip way to add another touchpoint with your team. And if the message is a good one, it can't help but increase the ROI of your training investment by extending its shelf life.

But now comes the fun part. What if we used a few minutes in that same podcast—the one we loaded with the training message—to go out to our audience to learn firsthand how all that training is working? We might hear Jim Salespro describe how the line of probing questions he just learned opened the door to one of his biggest orders. Ed Assembler might tell us how his safety training gives him more confidence in his factory environment. And perhaps we'd listen as Carrie in Customer Service relates a story about how she turned a disgruntled subscriber's frown upside down as a direct result of her conflict resolution training. Get the picture? Through this series of follow-up interviews, we've used our podcast to give our audience a timely reminder of our training message and then reinforced it with a real-life example of how it's put into practice.

In a sales training scenario, here's something else you might add to the mix to strengthen your training message: a brief chat with a sales, product, or marketing manager. After all, they're the ones who know your product's features and benefits inside and out. They'll talk about the hot topics in the marketplace. And they'd certainly have something to say about what the competition is up to. Their contribution to your podcast would add more muscle to your training message through a richer, more complex landscape of the sales picture.

Now, call this the icing on the podcast cake—a customer testimonial. You certainly have a healthy list of satisfied customers. Pick one or two and ask them for a few words on their buying experience. What was the key differentiator that moved the sale away from the competition and directly into your "win" column? Would they recommend your product to a colleague, and why? There's a lot to be learned from what your customers have to say. And it's empowering to hear them say it.

Probably the most powerful component of using the podcast in training is that it can feature the voices of those who know the subject matter best. The training and marketing managers can bring the passion of their topic, the corporate management can inspire as they do face-to-face, and the end-user of the training can convey the personal satisfaction of their achievement that came as a direct result of their training. Tough to do that by e-mail.

Now there are many organizations that may not be convinced enough of the podcast platform to invest in iPods for everyone; they're not exactly cheap. There are less expensive alternatives out there. Some companies offer to split the expense of the iPod with employees. After all, you don't believe for a second that they won't add a few hundred hot tracks to the mix, do you? But then again not everyone needs to listen to this corporate message while they drive, work out, or walk the dog. They can listen just as easily while they sit in front of their computers.

Another great advantage to the podcast in training reinforcement is the audience's ability to easily archive the content, and more important, retrieve it when they need a quick refresher. The goods news is that if your podcast is upbeat and compelling, your audience will be more than willing to go back and listen again—and again.

The podcast can't boast the kind of high-tech glitz and glamour of flashy distance learning and simulation tools – they obviously have an important place. But the growing trend of communicating through podcasting avails training professionals the opportunity to reinforce their message in a very cost-effective and user-friendly way.

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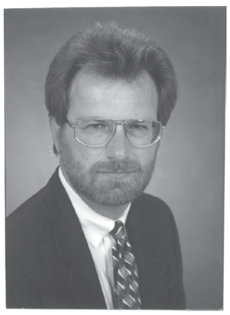
Dan Walker, who spent the first 25 years of his career as a major-market broadcaster, is a partner in the MarComm Store, which specializes in the development of custom training and marketing support products, including custom broadcast quality corporate podcasts (i.e., SMT Radio), print, Web and Flash creative design. Dan has been consulting Fortune 500 companies for more than 15 years and is the founder of SalesRepRadio.com. With offices in Naperville, IL, Dan may be reached at (630) 871-2000, or by e-mail at dan.walker@marcommstore.com

Keeping Training Relevant to Today

Interview with Ben Ball



How long has your sales force curriculum been in place? Is it relevant to the customer relationships your sales force is having today? A recent conversation I had with Ben Ball, Vice President of Dechert-Hampe, made me think about trainers and how they stay current with what is happening in the field. What are the major customer challenges? What are the major areas a sales force delivers value to the customer? Ben has experience with many Fortune 500 companies and specializes in the area of customer development. I appreciate his taking time out to share his thoughts on this topic.

Training Today: Ben, what are some ways you see for a Training Organization to stay close to the changes in the industry and the customer?

Ben Ball:

1) Attend industry conferences. If you attend the Professional Society for Sales and Marketing Training annual conference, also attend an industry-specific conference like the Hardware Show or the NCA's Candy Expo or the equivalent for your industry.

2) Sit in on account team meetings. Get to know salespeople and their issues at all levels outside the training environment.

3) Attend sales meetings. Get involved with planning the agenda at national sales meetings—with general topics as well as training topics. Figure out a way to add value. Attend as many meetings as you can so you can understand the future direction of the sales force, new products, account plans, and discussion of issues.

4) Work with salespeople as they make account calls. See how people are using training. See what is going well and where challenges are. Learn as much as you can about their customer interactions and about customers.

5) Assist the organization in implementing a Customer Feedback Survey to find out how well the sales force, and perhaps the organization, is delivering products and services to the customers.

Training Today: What is the greatest benefit of Training staying close to the customer?

Ben Ball: It is to get the longer-term view of what will be expected from the sales force. Customer expectations of your sales team, what they value about a salesperson's performance, and what differentiates your sales team from the competition all change over time. So, the most important thing Training can do is to develop a curriculum for the needs of a sales force in the future rather than only what is required now or what was required in the past. In order to get that future view, it is critical to get direct input from customers and others outside the company in addition to internal sources.

The number one reason for Training to stay in touch with customers is to give training relevance to the Sales organization. Salespeople are interested in improving performance so they can make quotas and earn a bonus. When your training has a direct impact on those, you have relevance by focusing on what makes the sales team effective with the customer. That's why knowledge about the sales force AND the customer base is critical for Training.

The Training department is constantly battling for credibility. We are fighting the "Those that can, do; those that can't, teach" mentality. Veteran and talented salespeople often come into a training session with the unasked question, "So, what is it that YOU are you going to teach me when I'm the one out there every day?" The trainer starts gaining credibility when they can demonstrate their knowledge of the customer and the day-to-day experiences of the sales team with statements such as, "When I was at Wal-Mart last week…" and they aren't talking about shopping! When they make an account call with a salesperson, word gets around that Training is out there in the trenches, is grounded in the business and understands. Talking about problems or issues trainers have seen or experienced firsthand is very effective when offering solutions in the classroom.

Ben Ball is Vice President of Dechert-Hampe, where he specializes in customer development, implementing go-to-market strategies and tactics that build a stronger customer franchise and superior financial performance. As the lead on customer development for DHC, he works with companies such as Ameritech (AT&T), Bayer, Con Agra, Hewlett-Packard Company, Nabisco, Inc., Pillsbury, and Mars, Inc.

Interview conducted by Renie McClay, Editor of *Sales Training Solutions,* written with 10 other sales training authors and available through Amazon.com. She can be reached at www.salestrainingutopia.com.

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Alliance Organizations

ACPI
Association of Career Professionals International: www.acpinternational.org

CCASTD
Chicago Chapter of the American Society for Training & Development: www.ccastd.org

CISPI
Chicago Chapter of the International Society for Performance Improvement: www.cispi.com

CODIC
Chicago Organizational Development Institute Chapter: www.codic.us

ICFC
International Coaching Federation of Chicago: www.chicagocoaches.com

NSA-IL
National Speakers Association-Illinois: www.nsa-il.org

ODNC
Organization Development Network-Chicago: www.odnetwork.org/odnc

SHRP
Society for Human Resource Professionals (Chicago Chapter of SHRM): www.shrp.org

SITE
Society of Insurance Trainers & Educators: www.insurancetrainers.org

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