

## **Training Key To Top Performance**

By Dr. Jennifer Newman and Dr. Darryl Grigg

*Originally appeared in The Vancouver Sun September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2006 as "Lack of Training: It's A Perilous Course"*

Employers sometimes think that once an employee has been trained, either through formal education or on-the-job experience, the employee will perform optimally. And so they don't pay attention to their employees' need for continued learning and growth, arguing they will save time and money on expensive training programs.

However, employers chart this course at their peril. Maintaining top employee performance in the long term requires time, money and effort on the part of companies. Failing to give staff effective, ongoing learning opportunities can, ironically, end up being costly when staff productivity is compromised due to gaps in knowledge, skill or outmoded methods.

Research shows that employees whose companies teach them, offer assistance in their career goals and develop responsive supervisors perform better and are more satisfied in their jobs. Companies that put time and energy into employee growth and development make gains in employee productivity and performance as well as being psychologically healthy.

There are five factors important to the creation of a psychologically healthy workplace including involving employees in the company, supporting employee work-home balance, promoting health and safety, recognizing employees for their efforts and fostering staff growth and development.

This week, we discuss how to promote staff growth and development, while in our last column we talked about ways to ensure employee involvement in your organization.

According to the American Psychological Association, there are five ways organizations can ensure employee growth and optimal performance.

## **1. Provide Job Enhancement Opportunities**

Offer employees ways to extend their knowledge about their work. Not only does this prevent employees from feeling like they are stuck in a rut, it also gives staff a chance to be creative. By deepening their knowledge of their particular field, technology or role, employees can become better problem solvers. For example, understanding industry trends in the software field can help designers gauge the potential utility of their solutions.

Providing workshops, seminars, even subscriptions to industry magazines and access to libraries, can spark innovation, increase productivity and keep employees up-to-date.

## **2. Encourage Career Advancement**

This might seem counter-intuitive when organizations are competing with each other for talent. Employers may ask, “Why would I pay to train people to advance in their careers when it may mean they will outgrow their job or even the company?”

The answer is that bored, unchallenged and restless employees also leave. By providing access to education that meets staff’s long term goals, organizations reap rewards in productivity. Staff remain longer with companies that are concerned about them and their futures. If employees feel an employer is stunting their growth to keep them in a position, they can’t give their best. And the company could lose a valuable employee. Find out what staff want for their career or what they aspire to in the long term and help them get there. An employee who feels cared about by the company will care about the company’s future.

Provide tuition re-imbusement for post-secondary education that fits with company directions. Larger organizations can afford their own “corporate universities” that help employees train for the next level. Mentoring programs for people who wish to advance can help and be cost effective or “shadowing” a desired position can aid staff in advancing their careers.

### **3. Identify Career Advancement Paths**

Companies that chart career paths within the organization are more productive. They retain personnel and as such are psychologically healthy. When staff know what they need to do to move to the next level, they are motivated to learn new skills and accept more challenge and responsibility. Provide staff with an idea of the steps necessary to move forward, the educational and skill requirements and what kind of track record they need to build to be considered for a more advanced position. Make sure these steps are current. It is disappointing and de-motivating to work hard on honing new skills only to find those skills aren't required anymore, or that the position was filled prior to posting.

At the same time, provide staff with clear feedback on what skills they need to improve to fit the job. Without concrete feedback, people will feel they are wasting their time.

### **4. Offer Coaching Programs**

Sometimes staff need help finding what they would like to do or would find most suitable to their lifestyle, values or personality. Also, companies may be interested in fitting people more closely with the job. Helping staff identify career goals and understand their aptitudes as well as fitting people with certain skills and traits to the right job is key. Sometimes people don't know what they want to do or are floundering in a job or career that is ill-suited to their skills. Provide access to career counseling, to help staff generate career goals that suit the employee and the company. By finding out what one really wants to do, staff can identify the role they most want in the organization, thereby enhancing performance and reducing job boredom.

Offering coaching to people in leadership roles is critical to increasing productivity and performance. Leaders benefit from being able to work on their performance goals on an individual basis. Coaching provides a venue to discuss a variety of leadership issues faced at work from offering difficult feedback to strategizing the implementation of a company-wide marketing plan for instance.

Maintaining peak performance at executive levels of an organization is an ongoing effort. Coaching, like physical fitness training, keeps leaders in shape for the long term.

### **5. Don't Forget Supervisor Development Needs**

Some of the most neglected members of an organization are line-supervisors. These leaders are responsible for managing, motivating and inspiring the people who keep the organization humming.

Without adequate training or development at this level, companies can experience losses of productivity, income and low morale.

Supervisors who are interpersonally effective and sensitive to such issues as racism and sexism are more effective. They tend to be more popular, experience fewer grievances and inspire staff to work well. If your immediate supervisor helps you balance work and home life, assists with difficult situations and emphasizes your well-being, you tend to be happier on-the-job.

When employees are faced with an ineffectual supervisor or a bully, in the worse case, they tend to burn out, quit or lose interest in their work. Time spent training supervisors is worth it in terms of increased profitability and productivity.

If your company provides employee growth and development opportunities to staff or any of the other four elements of a psychologically healthy workplace, you may be eligible for the Psychologically Healthy Workplace award to be given in June, 2007. The deadline for applications is January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2007. Contact us for more details and an application.

*Dr. Jennifer Newman and Dr. Darryl Grigg are registered psychologists and directors of Newman & Grigg Psychological and Consulting Services Ltd., a Vancouver-based corporate training and development partnership. Identifying information in cases cited has been changed to protect confidentiality. They can be contacted at: [sunmail@newmangrigg.com](mailto:sunmail@newmangrigg.com)*

