

STAFF DEVELOPMENT REQUIRES INSTRUCTION *AND* FEEDBACK

By Wayne Outlaw

Many Managers in organizations want staff to perform well, but they don't develop them. Failing to develop staff is like expecting a computer to operate without software or even normal maintenance. Even if you have the best hardware and the most up-to-date operating system, without application software and regular maintenance, it is not capable of performing a task well and swiftly. Without the correct input or information, the output would not be correct.

Even the most capable and highly motivated member of your staff will not be productive without the necessary training and management direction. The better the training and direction, the more the output and the better its quality.

Many people think only of a formal training system to develop staff. Specific job skills and capabilities must be learned and refined for an individual staff member or team to be productive. The skills needed range from simple physical tasks to complex human interactions.

Providing information and teaching someone how to do administrative tasks may be relatively simple, but to develop sales, service, leadership and management skills is much more involved. Simple instructions or classroom sessions are usually not enough. It may require classroom instruction, but an environment where on-the-job development is a priority.

Developing staff is more than just teaching knowledge and skills. It is communicating expectations and providing performance feedback. These factors are parts of an informal, interactive, development system in your organization. Regardless of the organization, it has a development system. Some are designed by conscious thought or process while others evolve over time. If you've hired great people, and your success depends on their productivity, it makes sense to create a staff development system that creates productive staff members.

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Knowledge is the information that enables employees to know how to respond correctly. It is obtained from company or industry sources, such as manuals, publications, and websites. It can also be learned by viewing live presentations, videos, audio tapes, Computer-based training, Web-based training, or just watching an employee do his or her job correctly.

Skill is the ability to accomplish something. Remember, an employee may understand the task, but having the ability to do it well is something else entirely. In the workplace, skill has usually been referred to a physical task or human interaction; however, today skill increasingly relates to creation or control of information.

Skills can be learned by watching others, but are best learned by practice. If it involves human interaction, coaching by a peer or superior is an excellent way to learn. In sales, service, and management it might even require a third person to act as an observer or coach.

Expectations are the methods, procedures, and standard practices that employees are expected to follow. Only when it is known what is expected, can a staff member meet or exceed those expectations. Expectations can be formal, written guidelines and policies, as well as, the “informal traditions” that are not written down, and may not even be often verbalized. Many organizations struggle with “defining their expectations” of employees, yet this can be one of the most productive acts the leadership can undertake.

Feedback is the instruction an employee is given to adjust his or her behavior. It enables the staff member to measure success and avoid failure. Without knowing if the action was successful (or performed the way it should be), staff cannot improve. Without the awareness of the consequences of a mistake or violation of a policy, there will be little or no motivation to correct or improve.

Today e-learning systems are “hot,” and companies are beginning to invest significant sums of money into them with the hope of developing employees and boosting productivity. A better

investment might be to improve the present staff development system before putting it on the web. If the formal (and informal) development system doesn't work well, be sure you have an effective staff development system before it is converted to an e-learning system or it will not make it better; only worse.

To succeed today requires that staff members be more productive, innovative, and effective than ever before. Today's economy demands more productivity from each individual at every level of the organization. Investing the time and effort to develop staff is an excellent strategy to improving profit and performance.

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