



7 REASONS YOUR TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IS NOT DRIVING EMPLOYEE RETENTION

There are numerous reasons organizations invest in the professional development of their employees. For one, the strongest brands are those with the most competent, motivated and high-performing people. When the folks behind the Great Places to Work designation overhauled their selection criteria several years ago, they said “Central to our new approach is Maximizing Human Potential.”

In addition to being the right thing to do, it's also profitable. Businesses that spend at least \$1,500 per employee annually on training activities reportedly earn 24% more profit than those with lower training budgets. [eLearning Industry.]

Further - and perhaps most important now, given the tight labor market - investing in employee development programs improves retention. We all know that having to replace a good employee is a significant hassle and time commitment, but it's also very expensive. According to SHRM, employee replacement can cost a company between 6 to 9 months of the employee's salary. That seems to be on the low end, as Gallup claims the cost to replace an employee is 1.5 to 2 times their salary.

Minimizing turnover doesn't just save an organization money and time, it also results in happier, more engaged, more knowledgeable, and more loyal employees. In LinkedIn Learning's 2021 Workplace Learning Report, 94% of employees say they would stay with their company if it invested in their development.

So why do so many training and development programs fail to effectively drive employee retention? The answer is in how they are structured, whether they serve merely as a box-checking exercise for HR or are woven into the company culture, how and whether managers are involved, the quality and specificity of training content, and other factors. In this report, we identify some of the key mistakes employers make when implementing development programs, and how to fix them.

Create a culture of not just learning new skills and insights, but in applying them in actual practice. Schedule time for employees to share key takeaways they learned and list specific event or client examples of how they could be applied.

1. CONFUSING TRAINING THAT BENEFITS THE COMPANY WITH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THAT BENEFITS THE EMPLOYEE.

Let's be clear: when managers teach their employees how to do their jobs, they're doing so for their own benefit, so the worker can do what the company expects of them, not for the employee's benefit. And while job-specific training is important, employees don't consider it an investment in their own career growth unless they're learning a skill that is portable, meaning it makes them more valuable in the marketplace.

Sir Richard Branson said "Train employees well enough so they can leave. Treat them well enough so they won't want to." This touches a chord with many employers, particularly owners of small businesses who are afraid that if they invest too much in an employee's development that they'll then take that knowledge and go elsewhere. Of course the alternative of not investing in them is far worse. As Henry Ford said, The only thing worse than training your employees and having them leave is not training them and having them stay. However, the data shows that the more they invest in their employees' professional development, the more likely they are to stay, as indicated by the LinkedIn survey referenced above.

SOLUTION: Invest in your employees' professional development, focusing on what benefits their career growth, not just to do the jobs you hired them for. A good rule of thumb is if the employee can take these new skills or insights to another job, then it's an investment in their growth.

2. NOT PROVIDING ENOUGH EVENT-SPECIFIC TRAINING.

Particularly when training is directed from HR or L&D departments, the focus is often on topics that are broadly applicable to as many employees as possible. And while a subscription to LinkedIn Learning might help someone learn how to do a pivot table in Excel, it's a far cry from the laser-focused, event-specific training employees need to stay on the cutting edge of ideas, skills, trends and insights that are rapidly changing in their fields.

Finding these types of learning resources and opportunities that are specific to the different jobs employees have, takes a little extra work. However, companies who take the time to source event-specific training will always have an edge over competitors who take a one-size-fits-all approach, both in terms of employee retention (91% of employees want personalized, relevant training [Clear Company]), and creating and producing more innovative and cost-effective events for their stakeholders.

SOLUTION: Take the time to talk to your employees and managers to find out what their needs are, and what it would take to elevate the skill set and work product they produce. Ask them for recommendations of where and how to get this training; make it a joint effort. Encourage them to stay abreast of how award-winning events are designed, and follow what industry innovators are doing. This input will help define the scope of the training opportunity.

3. OFFERING EDUCATION AS AN OPTIONAL RESOURCE, RATHER THAN MANAGER-DIRECTED DEVELOPMENT.

Simply offering employees access to training resources isn't enough. In most cases they won't use it, and if they do, they view it as one of many employee benefits the company offers to all its employees, like life insurance, and not an investment in their career growth. If you leave professional development up to the employee, only the most self-directed people will take advantage of it, and when they do, they won't ascribe the positive outcomes to your organization because they had to do it on their own.

This assumes the employees even know about it. As an example, at companies that offer some form of tuition reimbursement, only 40% of workers know about it, and an even smaller fraction - 2% of employees - actually participate in the program [InStride].

This points to an even bigger disconnect: While most companies say that employee development is a high priority for them, the vast majority of employees at those companies say they are on their own when it comes to their professional development.

The best L&D programs are manager-directed, and tie in to the employees' Individual Development Plans. According to the Harvard Business Review, "Too few training and skill-building programs create explicit roles for managers. This is a mistake. Managers have much more visibility and control over employees' priorities than a central HR or L&D team."

SOLUTION: Have ongoing learning and development become part of the employee's job, and like any other job responsibilities, it should be actively directed and reviewed by their manager.

...companies who take the time to source event-specific training will always have an edge over competitors who take a one-size-fits-all approach, both in terms of employee retention (91% of employees want personalized, relevant training [Clear Company]), and creating and producing more innovative and cost-effective events for their stakeholders.

4. NOT BUILDING IN TIME FOR LEARNING.

The best training and development resources are only as valuable as the employee's ability to make time to use them. Unfortunately, skill-building and training is often left to the employee to fit in at their discretion, which translates to them having to learn at night or on weekends, when they're brains are fried from long work hours. Providing development resources, but not making it conducive for employees to take time to actually utilize them, comes across as inauthentic. In addition, encouraging team members to carve out time to explore new skill areas and sharpen their creative thinking provides a platform for them to bring new ideas to the business.

Google is famous for giving their people the time and flexibility to explore ideas that interest them, learn new skills, and generally open their minds up to different ways of thinking about their business.

"We encourage our employees, in addition to their regular projects, to spend 20% of their time working on what they think will most benefit Google. This empowers them to be more creative and innovative. Many of our significant advances [like AdSense and Google News] have happened in this manner."
Sergey Brin and Larry Page

In his book *The Curious Advantage*, Novartis chief learning officer Simon Brown advocates that each employee spend 100 hours per year on learning. By identifying a specific target like this, Brown says managers and employees have a consistent metric to plan around. Having clear backing from senior leadership helps plow the road for adoption, as Brown received vocal support from Novartis CEO Vas Narasimhan.

SOLUTION: 1. Determine a target number of hours each employee should spend on professional development per year, then break it into quarterly targets for follow up and ensure it gets tracked. Companies average anywhere between 34 and 102 hours per year of learning per employee [Statista], but consider starting small and building from there. The most important thing is getting company-wide buy-in, and emphasizing that whatever number you use, it's a minimum, and additional learning is always encouraged.

2. Make it acceptable for employees to block time in their calendars for "Learning & Development", and have that time considered work hours, not personal.

5. NOT MAKING TALENT DEVELOPMENT PART OF HOW MANAGERS ARE EVALUATED.

It's not that managers don't want to develop the employees on their teams; it's just that they don't have time. Too often this is because developing a strong team in and of itself is not part of how managers are evaluated. By adding this to their own performance review criteria, companies will shift the managers' mindsets and make nurturing and developing strong teams a priority.

SOLUTION: Let managers know that developing the employees on their teams is an important part of their responsibilities, and will be included in their Individual Development Plans.

6. NOT HELPING EMPLOYEES APPLY LEARNING OUTCOMES TO THEIR JOBS.

OK, so you've provided training opportunities that are focused on employee development and not just helping them do their jobs. You've offered lots of event-specific training and not just generic topics. You've brought your managers into the loop and have made learning part of the development plans for their direct reports. You've allowed employees to build time into their schedules for learning. And you've made it clear that a big part of how managers are evaluated is how well they develop their staffs. Now what?

The final step is helping the employees apply what they learned to their events, clients, suppliers, and coworkers, in an effort to raise the bar across the board. When employees complete a given course or training module, managers should have a debrief with them to discuss how the concepts learned could be applied in various real-life scenarios at work. Even better, have them share those insights with the team, which helps build a culture of continuous learning and improvement. If an event producer learned about new content delivery models or room design configurations, discuss which clients and events those might be a good fit for. And if they're not, discuss why. This practice helps break down the compartmentalization that often happens with professional development, and weaves it into the workday.

SOLUTION: Create a culture of not just learning new skills and insights, but in applying them in actual practice. Schedule time for employees to share key takeaways they learned and list specific event or client examples of how they could be applied.

7. NOT HAVING A CLEARLY DEFINED CAREER PATH.

It's no secret that today's younger workers want opportunities for growth much faster than their predecessors. When they don't get it at their current job, the easiest option for them, unfortunately, is to leave for another company. In many cases, however, what employees are looking for is not necessarily an immediate promotion, but rather a clearly defined roadmap for them to earn that promotion. Without that roadmap, they have no idea what it takes to move up, or when that might happen. Team leaders who take the time to delineate the skills an employee needs to master to get to the next level are giving both their organizations and their staffs a tremendous advantage. Not only will this reduce turnover, but now they're shifting the onus of achieving advancement onto the employee, thereby empowering them - and incentivizing them - to work hard at enhancing their skill set.

SOLUTION: Carve out time to articulate the skills and experience needed to get from one level to the next for each job category. Take the mystery out of what determines getting promoted. Have managers discuss their career trajectory at annual reviews, and give them a sense of ownership over their own career growth.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about Event Leadership Institute Courses, Membership and Talent Development services, visit www.eventleadershipinstitute.com.