

# Train the trainer for corporate success

**MAIN THRUST** A strong focus on satisfying the consumer should be the highlight of every training programme in corporates

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The modern corporate environment is dynamic in nature, and its structure is seamless, permeable, amorphous and constantly reforming according to needs. Looking at organisational blunders, one might get very critical, but despite the best of intent and professionalism, they do happen. Every such incident should trigger a new challenge to reach higher levels of professionalism.

Some years back, I observed a particular group of sales staff in a branch performing 43 per cent below the objectives and the branch average. In a highly competitive and a fiercely fought market, this was shocking. Despite low sales, the local management was clueless.

My investigation revealed that:

- All employees belonged to various teams reporting to different superiors.
- All employees were graduates from one particular institution and selected through campus recruitment.
- All employees had joined together and trained by one particular manager.

This particular manager—a veteran, had grown up through the ranks after years of experience. He was a brilliant performer as a sales person, but after his promotion, the team always struggled.

My sixth sense suggested checking the quality of training all of them had undergone. Therefore, we decided to take a day-long session of mock calls with the team which revealed the following:

- Weak sales presentations.
- Selling on price and promotion, instead of value.
- Defensive mindset in objection handling.
- Tendency to skip uncomfortable objections.
- A lackadaisical attitude.

With such a weak sales process, the average recovery per client was also abysmally low. Having known the root cause, we initiated a training process which brought an end to the issue, but yet another serious organisational issue came up.

I asked the veteran manager to conduct a mock training session comprising objection handling and closing techniques in front of us. The session indicat-



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ed orderly sequencing as per training manual, but extremely poor training techniques. Further probing revealed the following, symptomatic organisational issues.

- Since he had a long service record with the organisation, none of the senior managers, all with a relatively lower service record, had trained him.
- The manager had picked up product knowledge and objection handling, on his own.
- Even though he was a successful sales person well versed with closing techniques, he was unable to teach to trainees.
- There was no formal training given to him.

Such blunders especially for trainers are not uncommon, particularly in high pressure industries. There is great urgency to send new recruits into the market as it's normal for sales and marketing managers to require people as of 'yesterday'.

In the process, trainers are decided on 'availability' and not 'competency'. Junior managers develop their skills in their own way, being pushed to train others.

Often, new recruits can bring in quick results, but man-

agers are quick to attribute the success to training rather than the enthusiasm of a new recruit, resulting in organisational myopia.

In the long run, the organisation suffers, as in the real case investigated above.

To avoid such disasters, the following could be general guidelines:

- Identify jobs that require formal training.
- Define job responsibilities, and skills to discharge them.
- Identify training content required to impart skills.
- Develop training material accordingly. Use a focus group discussion to develop training content.
- Ensure a healthy blend of theory and practice in content. For example, sales training should have mock sales calls and design team creating sample designs.
- Video record training sessions demonstrating facilitates.
- Develop a formal test to identify the extent of skills imparted in training.
- Develop a manual for trainers which should discuss the following:

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# Train the trainer...

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a. Adult learning process: The learning process especially in a corporate environment should rely more on participation and interaction. The importance of ASK model (attitudes, skills and knowledge) has to be highlighted. People remember 10 per cent of what they read and 90 per cent of what they actually do, and this must be the basis for the learning process.

b. Nuances of teaching and training: There are significant differences between teaching and training. Teaching isn't even one-tenth as effective as training. As a trainer the role is to be an active facilitator of the learning process, using real incidents and cases to demonstrate a point, with minimum theory.

c. Basics of public speaking: Public speaking is an art and possible to acquire by training. Effective speakers first set the stage by techniques like introductions, questions, humour, provoking or narrating an incident. Once the ice is broken, it's then easy to introduce the subject.

Humour is an important emotion, and considered an intangible benefit with a positive mental effect. One-liners and self-effacing humour are very effective to drive home an important point. Winston Churchill said on public speaking, "If you have an important point to make, don't try to be subtle or clever. Use the pile driver. Hit the point once. Then come back and hit it again. Then hit it a third time with a tremendous whack".

d. Presentation techniques: Use various techniques such as hands-on, lectures, story telling, use of metaphors, cross functional tests, group and individual exercises to avoid monotony and training fatigue. While experience sharing can build confidence, avoid excess of self-boasting. Give breaks once in two hours and the trainer must always set the rules for breaks and re-assembly. Tackle training related indiscipline with tact.

e. Becoming a mentor: As a trainer it's easy to assume the role of a mentor which helps



especially for a new batch. Mentoring also helps in employee retention being a good avenue to resolve grievances quickly.

f. Handouts: Training handouts even if read, have low retention as compared to what is practically done. If there is a need for a handout of material, then it's better to get it generated by the group, instead of distributing.

g. Closing effectively: At the end, one must summarise and use questions and answers to finish.

h. Training effectiveness: Oral and written tests, demos, questions and answers should be used to evaluate training effectiveness. Training feedback should facilitate upgrading the skills of the trainer and improving content.

■ Training aides: Familiarise the trainers with modern training aides such as Microsoft Office, projectors, files of different formats, especially for veteran trainers.

■ Define trainer competencies: Predetermine trainer competencies, based on qualifications, experience and skill sets.

■ First time trainers: Training is one-fourth preparation and three-fourth delivering. The speed of training should be such that it's neither fast and confusing, nor slow and boring. Check the skills and confidence of first-time trainers, before letting them train others.

■ DIY: It's a good practice to develop a DIY (do it yourself) CD/DVD so that trainees can go through to fill gaps in comprehension. Whirlpool, the leading appliances manufacturer, placed its sales reps' to live in a farmhouse near its headquarters at Michigan and outfitted it with their cooking range, dishwashers, microwaves, washers, dryers and refrigerators. When the sales reps' emerged, they had understood the products much better than they had in the classroom training. Organisations need to innovate in training methods and look at various options best suited for their product range.

Customers expect marketing people to have complete understanding of their products and demonstrate value. Thomas J Peters, American Management

Consultant, author and trainer, once said, "Train everyone lavishly, can't overspend on training". Training can actually increase recovery per client as trained marketing people can sell on value and avoid discounting. However we must take precautions and avoid investment going waste, especially in industries with high employee turnover.

The most important point in training the trainer is not to lose focus on ultimate corporate goal and strategies. Any successful corporate strategy hinges on the strength of its customer base, but in sales and marketing, often the emphasis shifts to short term goals such as 'making a sale and not a customer'.

The customer is the very reason for our being in business. A strong continuous focus on satisfying them makes more customers revolve around us. An effective training module for trainers and employees is at the origin of corporate success.

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