

Revamp training to achieve customer delight

Train your trainer Innovation and customisation is a solution for practical challenges

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Most globalisation, China has become the factory of the world and the marketing battles have traversed and penetrated deep in a level playing flat world. In the marketing context, with the insignificance of political boundaries and narrow product differentiations, success rests on the strength of 'experience of quality' by customers.

Companies continue to invest heavily on training and development, to upgrade their human capital. Yet, the reality in the market place hasn't changed much, raising a question on quality of training, as demonstrated by these experiences.

A representative of a prominent investment company can't analyse benefits of Plan A vs. Plan B.

A telecom executive supplying a broadband device can't complete installation.

A relationship executive can't answer why one should choose his hotel for a conference.

A show-room manager can't explain distinguishing features of various air-conditioners.

Brief induction

I probed further with the sales people who revealed their perspective of training programmes. Some were out on field, after brief induction. Surprisingly, in the investment company, 'product training' was a separate event, unconnected to 'sales training'. Incidentally, the hotel where relationship executive was working, had claimed, Six Sigma compliance.

With awareness of multiplicity of choices, people like to buy and not being sold. 'Customer delight' is an outcome of facilitating a customer to buy, offering an experience beyond expectation or promise, as against aggressive selling. Therefore, sales and product

training should reorient to understand 'customer needs and preferences' and work towards changing 'attitude and behavior' of sales people. In short, as we deal with more informed customers, the sales process has changed and conventional models like 'six steps of selling' need redrafting.

Increasing satisfaction

Typically, products and services marketing companies have three different levels of training: induction, selling skills and product knowledge.

However, a superior model should incorporate selling skills with product training, making it impactful and increasing satisfaction of customers and employees.

What prevents the companies from following this practice? The Training Manager of the investment company, referred earlier explained that number of new products and frequency of their launches makes it impossible to incorporate selling skills, in new product training.

Conceding these are practical issues, companies should work on the premise of no justifications for failures.

The question is what goes wrong in trainings? Why do managements feel, training isn't working? The following causes are suggestive of the improvements.

Poor planning: Content designing requires comprehensive evaluation of internal training modules, future requirements, competitive concerns and training process.

Often, planning goes erratic right in the beginning, with extended introductions. Inadequate time for slides, explanations, clarifications, Q&A etc. adds to ineffectiveness.

Providing adequate time for main sessions is critical for effectiveness. The middle class is expanding, with new customers from semi urban and rural areas. Further, people are migrating across the country. This has changed the profile of



employees and customers, demanding a validation of appropriateness of training in English.

The trainer: The trainer's profile should be appropriate to draw admiration and respect. I spoke to a junior manager in an electronics company who said, "Who does the training, depends on who is available"! Such instances lead to ineffec-

tiveness. Instead, companies should develop key employees for multitasking as trainers.

'Train your trainer' compulsorily and judiciously mix internal and external trainers.

Training compromises: Content, is often sacrificed due to indiscipline and distractions. For example, training may not start on time or won't begin as scheduled after a break. Fur-

ther, deviations from the topic are rampant. Such, compromises on content must be avoided.

Training techniques: Inappropriate technique is another cause. While, it's not practical for travel companies to let their sales people visit destinations before they sell, there are methods to create similar effect and excitement.

In this context, evaluate new techniques like paperless training, webinars, virtual and remote training, etc. Innovation and customisation is a solution to overcome practical challenges.

For instance, 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.

However, excess of any technique is counterproductive. Years back, we had hired a trainer who as an excellent communicator entertained our executives with jokes to emphasize his viewpoints. In the excited environment, he managed to come to the main theme only towards the end. Shockingly, the next morning I realized that the executives remembered most of the jokes, but not the sales techniques he had taught!

Therefore, training should have a fine blend of appropriate techniques.

Ineffective conclusion: As the clock ticks towards the end, conclusions are often hurried. Like a sales process, which isn't complete without closing, the last part of any training should effectively summarise the content, drawing individual action plans to achieve objectives. Without this, any training is bound to fail.

Weak implementation: Implementation often takes backseat due to lack of seriousness. Wherever feasible, superiors can participate as either trainees or observers. Superiors ensure consistent application of learning and supplement broad-based training with customised individual coaching, optimising results. Follow up sessions to review progress, should be part of the training plan. If not, you run the risk of participants considering the training as a 'welcome break'!

Evaluate productivity: Do we really evaluate training vis-à-vis objectives? A sales training for example, should improve business. Training to designers, should yield dramatic improvements in creativity.

Service training should result in increased customer sat-

isfaction. Accordingly, productivity evaluation should be mandatory, and the basis for next training. Feedback and suggestions from participants about quality of training helps improving content.

Employee turnover: This is the most common cause for failure. I have witnessed cases of participants missing on the second day of induction training!

This could be due to apprehension about their job suitability or nature of training. Employee turnover causes wastage of time, effort and investment on training.

Manpower productivity: Training should accomplish customer delight, and improve productivity. Manpower cost may have an upward trend, but companies should continuously monitor productivity. Revenue per manpower rupee is a valuable ratio to assess productivity.

Resistance to change: Training should focus on imparting skills and change attitude. Trainees' must realize the benefits of applying new skills and adapting their behavior and practices.

Productivity is the motive for investing time, money and effort on training.

Companies should conduct audit of programs conducted, measuring results against objectives, and identifying improvement areas, for the next training. Training audit is integral to HR audit, which is a modern management tool, for productivity improvement.

One doesn't become a soldier in a day; he goes through a rigorous and strenuous process, for days until ready for the battle. With globalization, the battle for market share depends on accomplishing customer delight.

Therefore, revamp your training content, train your people like soldiers and win more battles in the market place.

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