

Training has to be needs-based

By R. Palan Palaniappan and Jamaluddin Zainal

ONCE we have erased the common misconceptions surrounding training, we need to conduct training that is needs-based.

The comparison of an employee's present performance with his required performance establishes the training gap. A needs analysis helps us relate training to business needs and eliminates needless training. Training becomes prioritised on the basis of what employees *should know*, *must know* and what would be *nice to know*. Hence, whenever training is carried out to satisfy the identified need, it becomes central to business results.

It makes an impact on the bottom line. A well-planned programme ensures that appropriate learning in terms of knowledge, skills and attitude takes place during the learning event, and closes the training gap. An effective programme also defines the ways to validate whether learning did take place or not. And if learning did take place, was it significant enough?

Today in the United States, US\$4 billion (about RM10.4 billion) are spent on human resources development. In Malaysia, the financial and services sectors — banks and insurance companies — are required by Bank Negara to spend 2.5 per cent of their annual pay-

roll on training.

The recent Human Resource Development Fund Act of 1993 requires manufacturing companies to contribute one per cent of the annual payroll to the fund; the fund in turn reimburses the companies for money spent on training. As of today, a total of 3,294 manufacturers have contributed a total of RM61.1 million to the fund.

Much of this money is wasted due to training that is not needs-based. We have more of "needless" training than "needed" training. Service businesses more than manufacturing businesses are guilty of this approach. It is important to note that training should be to satisfy identified needs.

LINE MANAGEMENT INVOLVEMENT

Involvement of line management is crucial to identify training needs. There is a need for a partnership between line management and the training manager. For any successful change in performance, we need the trainee to be aware of his present performance; there needs to be a desire for the change and finally some positive action.

Training can contribute to positive action by ensuring that appropriate learning is essential for change to take place. However, to ensure that change does really take place, the trainee needs support. This support must come from the line manager. According to Dean Spitzer, training only be-

comes relevant to the organisation when the new skills learned are applied on the job. No training department can assure the organisation that this transfer can take place. Only the line manager can.

How many times have we found an employee come back from a course to work with unbridled enthusiasm? It only takes a few days for him to realise that he cannot put any of the new ideas into practice as he is an island at the work station. He has no support from anyone.

Just view the success stories of McDonalds or Walt Disney. How is it that they can train school-leavers to provide excellent customer service, whereas we cannot get graduates to provide basic customer service?

The line manager can support the training department with "briefing" and "debriefing" sessions with the employees. The former involves spending time with the employee prior to training. There needs to be discussions about the goals to be achieved.

After the training, the manager should not ask the employee simple questions like "How was the training?" which usually elicits responses such "Good food, good jokes lah." Rather, the employee should be debriefed. This involves getting feedback from the trainee on his action plans and supporting him for positive changes. Training is an important support function which can only be effective with line management support.

CONSISTENCY AND SUPPORT

Ian Carlson took over the Scandinavian Airlines Systems (SAS) at a particularly difficult time. His task was to turn around the ailing airline. The various steps he undertook include a major reorganisation exercise and defining the company's direction.

SAS wanted to increase its market share of business

travellers in Europe. It positioned itself to attack the business segment of the European market. Training was allowed to play a proactive role by being involved in all the discussions concerning the mainstream of the business. So training personnel had a chance to inquire about the relevance of any training rather than just be facilitators.

The SAS strategy had the right structure to support it but a complete overhaul of staff-customer relationships was needed. SAS identified two tangible issues: punctuality and cabin service.

The "Moments of Truth" one-day training programme for everyone in SAS was launched. Each member of top management was committed and fully supported the programme. Those who did not were removed from SAS. Carlson was there personally as often as he could. Everyone from the board to the ticketing clerk attended the programme to ensure consistency and standardisation of service throughout SAS.

The rest is history. The SAS turnaround was one of the most remarkable achievements in the airline world and in corporate history.

A large local bank implemented a similar programme in Malaysia. The bank experienced several positive benefits too.

In short, training can make substantial contributions to business if it is needs-based, if it has line management support, and if basic misconceptions about it are removed.

However, to quote Henry Ford:

*If you think you can, You can
If you think you can't, you can't
Either way you are right*

□ Dr R. Palan Palaniappan is the managing director of Specialist Management Resources Sdn Bhd. Jamaluddin Zainal is the training manager of UMW Corporation.

WHEN YOU RESIGN

- Give due written notice as required.
- Express gratitude to the employer you are leaving.
- Leave professionally, with grace. Don't slam doors or create sour ties.
- Do your best to hand over your work responsibilities.
- Be as cooperative as you can.
- Do not spend your last days badmouthing and creating frustration for others.
- Do not boast about your new job.

