



## ENSURING YOUR INVESTMENT IN TRAINING PAYS OFF

KEYS TO REALIZING LONG-TERM RESULTS

*The customer service manager wearily read the memo from corporate. A new training program was coming his way. He started gathering his management team to figure out how they would weather this training that would likely drain resources, take people off the phones and generally wreak havoc. Then, once the training was over, it would never be mentioned again.*

*Across town at the local bank, a celebration was just getting under way. Reports from the last quarter indicated customer churn was down, and customer feedback showed they were noticing something special and different in their interactions with the bank. The senior vice president of the retail division decided to share the good news with the teams that had worked so hard to create better customer experiences.*

Anyone who has been involved in a training implementation can no doubt relate to one of these scenarios. Why is it that some organizations unsuccessfully launch training program after training program to “fix” the organization’s perceived ills, while others have training programs that *do* make a difference? And what impact do these widely varying results have on the future of training in an organization?

After years of investing thousands, even millions, of precious revenue dollars in “soft skills” train-

ing, often without seeing any lasting impact or real payoff, executives have begun to demand justification for training dollars spent. Training for training’s sake is no longer acceptable in the face of competition for diminishing resources.

Those responsible for organizational development are being asked to explain why a training program should take precedence over new technology, better facilities or other tangible organizational needs. If their answers are not compelling, and if the training is not tied to organizational objectives, the tangibles will win the resources.

A service quality training initiative *can* significantly improve the profitability of an organization. The key lies in the implementation. First, it’s important to challenge some long-held traditional myths about training and the way it is implemented.

### DISPELLING THE MYTHS

#### *Myth #1: Training is an expense.*

Following this assumption, when resources are stretched and reorganization, restructuring or rightsizing affects the stability of the organization, training is viewed as unnecessary. It often is the first line item nixed during budget cuts.

Time and again, however, research and customer case studies have shown this is backward thinking. In fact, times of organizational uncertainty



are actually the *most important* times to invest in customer service training. Consider this:

Customer service training boosts morale and commitment by showing employees they are a valued and important resource, even in the midst of unsettling change. The training itself provides skills and enthusiasm to help participants provide dazzling customer experiences. Dazzling customer experiences, in turn, lead to loyalty.

Simply put, skills training that equips employees with the tools to increase customer loyalty is *not* overhead, a cost or a “frill.” Executives who doubt its power to improve the bottom line haven’t done their homework—or have not implemented the training in a way that yields lasting, positive impact.

*Myth #2: Executives can delegate their participation and involvement in training.*

When it matters to senior management, it matters to everyone else. If executives expect their employees to be committed to delivering world-class service, they must first be committed themselves—and show it. Methods of “showing it” include memos, meetings, newsletters, personally introducing each training session and, most important, participating in the training themselves.

In fact, it may be the executives who need training the most. They often get so busy, so task-oriented and so far removed from personal interaction with external customers that they neglect people skills. As Carl Albrecht and Ron Zemke once said, “Quality service is a top-down affair. It starts at the top, or it doesn’t start.”

**IMPLEMENTATION IS THE KEY**

AchieveGlobal believes training is critical to an organization’s growth through the continued development of people. It also is a strategy for re-

taining customers while reducing organizational waste.

In AchieveGlobal’s approach to training implementation, factors that might otherwise cause uneven training results are carefully planned and managed. Benefits to individuals are clearly defined while alignment with organizational strategies is achieved, so that the training effort becomes a clear contributor to success.

In short, the return on training dollars is maximized. AchieveGlobal believes that training is not a storm to be weathered; rather, it is a means for instilling skills that propel the organization toward its goals. Our approach to training implementation has three steps:

- Build a business case
- Engage senior management
- Create an implementation team

Together, these three steps lead to success. They involve all levels and distribute responsibility for success across line and staff functions. Training becomes more than a one-time event; rather, it becomes an organizationwide effort to create lasting change.

*Step #1: Build a business case*

Training that is not clearly linked to organizational objectives is doomed from the start. In times of relative resource wealth, training departments could afford to offer courses that “helped employees do a better job.” Those days are gone. Shrinking resources demand that training departments and other developmental functions offer programs that clearly result in change and align with bottom-line results.

Take, for example, an organization with an identified strategy for growth. Customer relations training can be positioned to help build loyalty in existing customers so that they are not leaving while

new ones are coming. This training clearly impacts bottom-line revenues.

Another company might want to reduce re-work and waste. They see training as a way to ensure that customers' needs are met in one interaction— one-stop shopping. In this case, training helps control expenses.

A solid business case for training also implies measurable outcomes. Relating training to bottom-line results is arduous. Many factors are involved, yet measurable outcomes *can* be defined.

For example, outcomes might be defined in terms of the way employees behave when interacting with customers. Or they might be defined in terms of desired customer behaviors (positive word of mouth, intent to repurchase, etc.). By creating a business case for training, an organization can define these outcomes and track progress toward them.

### *Step #2: Engage senior management*

Organizations in which senior management is involved in implementing the training tend to realize far better results than those in which the training initiative is the sole responsibility of the training function. Not only does management's involvement demonstrate commitment to creating change, but it also provides the leverage necessary to allocate appropriate resources and remove organizational barriers. These are the people who can "make it happen."

Senior management typically is involved in the decision to move forward with training by either creating or understanding and agreeing to the business case for the initiative. In many cases, however, this is where their involvement ends. And this is where the opportunity to realize greater return on resources is lost.

With AchieveGlobal's approach, senior management lays the groundwork necessary for training success. Specifically, senior management's role is to:

- identify specific organizational objectives and agree on what evaluative information will be used to ensure they are being met
- identify how the desired behavior changes match performance management systems
- identify timelines and expectations for rolling out the training
- allocate resources to ensure the participants' training experience is managed appropriately
- charter and remove barriers for the team that will implement the training tactically
- act as champions for the training through individual action, as well as by designating a sponsor for the implementation

When senior management is proactively involved, those implementing the training avoid an uphill battle for resources and support. More importantly, management's visible commitment to the effort demonstrates that the effort is "real"—not the "program of the month."

### *Step #3: Create an implementation team*

Getting a training initiative off and running is an enormous task. Just as companies strive to manage customer experiences in order to build loyalty, they also must manage training experiences in order to build assurance that new skills will be learned and put to use.

While various functions working together are responsible for creating successful customer experi-



ences, the onus of creating positive training experiences typically falls on one function: the training department.

Problem is, much of what impacts a participant's evaluation of a training program happens before and after the actual classroom visit. Things such as manager and supervisor communication before the training and coaching after the training can, if left unmanaged, scuttle the best of training implementations.

A cross-functional team chartered to manage the total training experience has saved the day in many organizations. Such a team typically is composed of training professionals, line supervisors and managers, representatives from marketing and a corporate communications professional. Working together, team members design what participants will experience before, during and after the training. Specifically, the team:

- selects facilitators to deliver training
- determines schedules that maximize benefits for the participants and the organization
- translates the senior managers' communication plans into tangibles through invitations to training, etc.
- manages the classroom experience by ensuring adequate facilities and amenities

- supports line supervisors and managers with reinforcement tools
- conducts progress evaluations and creates reports for the senior management team

This “whole organization/whole experience” approach to managing a training implementation not only distributes the duties, allowing each to be performed better, but it also builds excitement. Perhaps the worst blow to a training program is treating it as something to be checked off the “to do” list. The team approach allows for greater creativity and accountability in truly making the training matter.

#### **AN APPROACH THAT PAYS OFF**

AchieveGlobal's approach to training implementation ensures the organization owns the training successes as well as the processes used to achieve them. In essence, this proven, time-tested approach ensures your organization's investment in training pays off and helps training and development functions show value to the organization through partnering and return on investment.

#### **ABOUT ACHIEVEGLOBAL**

AchieveGlobal is the world's leading resource for helping organizations translate business strategies into business results by developing the skills and performance of their people. We are a single resource for aligning employee performance with organizational strategy through training and consulting solutions in sales performance, customer loyalty, leadership and teamwork.

We work with organizations in a wide range of industries—in both U.S. and global implementations—and serve more than 400 of the Fortune 500 companies and more than 400 of the European Financial Times 500.



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