

Engaging Your Program Participants

A How-to-Guide for Corporate Training

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Recruit, Select, Develop, and Retain 1: Overview

Summary: In today's tough environment, training departments may need to "pitch in" when it comes to the human resources function even more than ever before. In this series, we will examine the role of training in major HR functions, such as recruiting, employee selection, developing employees, and retention.

The "new" economic environment is calling for all of us to do more with less in the form of resources, both human and financial. As we examine training's role in HR functions, let's first take a look at why we would need or want to get involved when we have our own departments to manage. Keep in mind that our discussion is based on the potential for training's involvement in HR functions, and that we are taking a "voluntary" look at getting involved in those functions. In other words, some organizations may not be the right fit for a training-HR joint venture, so be sure to examine the situation closely before offering your services.

First, as we've mentioned, the new economic environment requires everyone to do more with fewer resources. In some industries and organizations, hiring may be moving again, but it may not be a priority in others. On the other hand, some industries with high turnover may have been hiring during the recession and are continuing to hire even during the slow and shaky recovery. Wherever you are, consider the fact that selecting and retaining the right employees is going to be vitally important going forward. We don't want to spend too much of our organizations' hard-earned cash on a repeat cycle of hiring and re-hiring. So it seems that it may be an economic necessity to involve training with HR functions.

Next, remember that many training personnel, especially the instructors and facilitators, are people-oriented, just like HR's front line. In an environment where potential employees can

see right through a false positive attitude, it may be necessary to use HR and training together to ensure that the "people process" is real - and not just "lip service."

But beyond all of this, how exactly does training fit in with the overall HR picture? For starters, training departments know who succeeds - and how they do it. For example, your training department may handle new-hire training at various levels. In that role, your instructors see how the most qualified candidates survive training, react to the company's policies and procedures, and move on to have successful careers. On the other side of that, your training staff can probably pinpoint a few good reasons why candidates fail either in training or within the first 90 days. These are built-in benchmarks, which we will discuss in detail.

Training can also take people through their career path, even before they embark upon it. If you've taken the time to build an effective training program, even if it has been on hold during economic uncertainty, you can use the program to help people figure out what their next move can be. And you can do this at any time during their careers. In this sense, training serves as a career counselor, especially if HR is too busy in other areas.

As we discussed, no move into assisting HR should be undertaken in a way that would offend or indicate that HR personnel are not performing. So the question here is, "How do I offer the assistance of the training department without 'muscling in'?" First, use what you'll learn in this series as a marketing campaign. For the most part, much of the information you can share with HR is built in to your training programs, or into the evaluation of participants after training. It may take a little work to build composite pictures of successful job candidates, but after that HR may be able to move forward with what you've provided. But if you can, you may want to offer a slightly more active role, in which you and your department participate in major HR functions, like recruitment and selection. Naturally the training role grows

when it comes to development and retention, but why not offer help on the front end as well?

Overall, your approach can be one that focuses on the fact that economics dictates your assistance, both now and in the long run. Now that we've taken a broad overview of the training role in HR functions, let's move to recruitment.

2: Recruiting

Summary: The recruiting function is perhaps one of the most important within the organization. After all, if recruiting goes wrong, the hiring cycle has to kick into overdrive. Let's look at how the training department can assist HR in recruiting.

An organization's recruiters perform a vitally important job, especially in this environment. Consider this: with a national unemployment rate near 10 percent, with some states and metro areas even higher, recruiters are most likely fielding hundreds of resumes for one or two positions. Although recruiters' stock and trade is determining who is the potential "right fit," it may be easier with so many resumes if they have a highly concrete view of the best job candidates. That's why it may be just as important for training to get involved in the recruiting process.

First, remember that training has an in-depth view of how people do after they are hired. In some organizations, new hire training may last for weeks, with trainers and facilitators becoming very involved in bringing the new employees up to speed. In this way, training has great knowledge of who succeeds, why they succeed, and how they do it. In some organizations, training departments may already be sharing this information with HR. But let's face it: in less difficult times, training was concerned with its bottom line and getting people through the new hire process as efficiently as possible. If your training department was doing this, can you honestly

say that they shared any kind of benchmarks with HR? If not, consider creating a "roadmap" or "profile" of the best candidates in each job. Sit down with your staff and simply brainstorm this topic - chances are that instructors will be able to construct an accurate profile rather quickly. Have them examine the backgrounds, attributes, and attitudes of their best performers. Alternatively, have them examine the same aspects of people who either left before training ended or shortly thereafter. Once you have created these profiles, share them with your recruiting contacts. You may find that recruiters did not know some of the things you found out, or maybe they did. But either way, your continued contribution in this area will be valuable.

Many organizations are attending job fairs or other recruiting events. As we discussed in the overview, training people are generally enthusiastic players, that is, the ones who can really help in attracting talent. If you can, offer HR the services of your star trainers or facilitators, even if it's for one afternoon recruiting event. The group may find that the combination of HR and training creates a great balance of enthusiasm, coupled with the knowledge of which event participants will be the best candidates for the open positions.

In a related area, training personnel can set themselves up as "coaches" even before the hiring begins. For example, if an instructor or facilitator attends a job fair with a recruiter, he or she can allude to the fact that the "coach" is here now and will be there when you need them during the on-boarding process. This is not only encouraging to a potential recruit, it's also a form of advertising. No one wants to feel like they are going to be alone after they get hired.

In the way of marketing and advertising, your efficient and well-constructed training program can serve as a walking advertisement on its own. For example, as candidates finish their chats with recruiters at hiring events, consider

having the instructors or facilitators take just a few moments to discuss the training program, potential career paths, and the support they may receive as they go through their careers with your organization. This may be a novel or even unusual approach for a recruiting event, but even in the current environment the best candidates may have a few choices of employers. The fact that the "next step" after hiring is represented on the front end may go along way in attracting the best and brightest candidates. And with those candidates poised to come into the organization, the process of developing and retaining them may seem a little easier.

Recruiting tends to create a pool of candidates, many of them with the same knowledge, skills, and abilities. Once they are in the process, HR and hiring managers have to make their selections. And this is another area where training can lend a hand.

3: Employee Selection

Summary: Although the training department may be able to take an active role in the recruiting process, the role is more indirect for employee selection. Let's examine some contributions you can make to the selection process.

If your department has been able to assist in recruiting, you may have been able to help bring in a pool of talented job candidates. But when it comes to selection, the major responsibility passes to the hiring manager and HR. How can training participate in this process, even from a less direct perspective?

First, your overall training program should include management training, which, in turn, should include training on the entire hiring process. In some organizations, you'll find that managers and those wanting to be promoted must take a "core" of courses that teach the hiring process, the management process, such as coaching, corrective action, and performance

evaluation, and then leadership. If your organization already does this, take a look at how the hiring training is set up. If not, now might be the time to create a program.

To start with, both experienced and inexperienced managers can use a hand on resume evaluation, especially in an environment where the pool of candidates could still be rather large. You may be able to create your own program in tandem with HR. It doesn't need to be anything fancy and may even lend itself to an online piece. Or, you may want to outsource this type of training once or twice a year. But more importantly, you will want to train managers on interviewing. Believe it or not, interviewees are reporting all kinds of horrors, ranging from hiring managers asking inappropriate questions to those same managers taking phone calls or checking emails during the interview. As the educational institution within your organization, you want to make sure this is not happening. What if you narrow the candidates down to one or two and a manager makes interview mistakes? Those bright candidates may just have another job waiting for them.

In addition to the obvious, interviewing training should focus on teaching managers how to create job-based behavioral interviewing questions that will explain how a candidate makes decisions and works within a team. Also, interviewing courses should touch on how to create an effective interview template, especially if the manager is interviewing numerous people over a few weeks. It's easy to forget "who's who" after a series of interviews, so the template a manager creates should jump-start his or her memory. Finally, add communication skills and panel interview techniques to the training. When managers emerge, they will be able to conduct professional interviews, which speak volumes about them and their organizations, as well as have memorable "portraits" of each candidate.

Moving from the actual training role, your department can also offer support. Again, HR may be overworked trying to recruit and set up interviews, so your help internally may take some of the burden. For example, newer managers may need to discuss their interview questions, their templates, or even their interviews. In the absence of an HR presence, or even in tandem with a recruiter, your assistance can be invaluable for a manager who is trying to make a difficult hiring decision.

To augment this assistance, either during the hiring process or during the training, have your staff use their benchmarking to help managers. For example, your new-hire trainers may be able to coach managers in the initial stages of creating their interview questions and templates using the successful competencies they've uncovered over time. If you translate those successful traits into interview questions, the hiring manager will be more able to judge whether the candidates have those traits or not.

The one caveat to training involvement in selection is to remember that it really is an indirect, passive role. Try to avoid having training personnel in on interviews. Too many people in an interview may lead the candidate to believe that no one makes decisions at the organization. Plus, the interviews should be confined to those who will be making the actual decision, such as hiring managers, colleagues, stakeholders, or human resources representatives.

Next, we will move into the more obvious roles that training has in the hiring process: development and retention.

4: Development

Summary: The development component of human resources is the training department's stock and trade. As we continue our discussion of the training role in some HR responsibilities, we will take a deeper look at development.

The development of human capital is a primary role for training. Development can come in many forms, which we will review. However, we will take a different view on development by determining how we can best leverage HR in this all-important facet of day-to-day business.

First, let's examine formal training programs, such as classroom, online, and social-media based learning. Depending on your organization and its scope, you may have formal training in place for just about every position. Or, you may have a formal training program that serves as a "funnel" for the rest of the organization. Your formal training program may be a blended approach, where participants attend class and then go to online learning interventions, but it may also use one approach or the other. However your formal training is structured, you can rely on HR to help you evaluate and improve each component. You are probably already evaluating training from the participant and supervisor perspective, but have you ever considered going in tandem with HR to evaluate training?

The HR department is usually privy to descriptive numbers, such as position turnover, promotions, voluntary termination, and involuntary termination. In cases of involuntary turnover, HR will usually know the reason. If this is the case at your organization, you can obtain a profile of what's happening after training. For example, if you find that involuntary terminations occur often because of certain procedural issues, perhaps training needs to be improved in those areas. On the other hand, if terminations are involuntary because of issues with managers or supervisors, the problem could lie with management or leadership training. Obviously the data HR can give you will not spell out the problem letter for letter, but it will more than likely help you narrow down some improvements to the overall training program.

There are other ways to get involved with HR in employee development. For example, does your organization have an on-the-job training program? If not, on-the-job (OTJ) programs are an effective joint venture for HR and training. Because OTJ combines a learning intervention with job progression, both HR and training can take what they learn from OTJ results and improve programs. If the people that are hired can't seem to make it past certain points in the OTJ program, HR may need to look back at the overall profile of the best candidates. Alternatively, training may need to improve the components of the OTJ program.

The key with formal development programs is to have HR on board with what you are trying to do. When you begin looking at designing and implementing a new program, get HR personnel involved. For example, if new hire training is under development or redevelopment, involve the recruiters in the process. Just as your area can give them feedback on the potential candidate profile, they can give you feedback on what skills managers are really looking for. If you are looking to implement training at other levels, such as employee selection, which we've already discussed, involve HR from the very beginning. This way, you are creating a team environment where HR is closely aligned with training - and vice versa.

With this in mind, let's move on to the "other side" of employee development, which involves career paths, coaching, mentoring, and other informal training interventions.

5: Development 2

Summary: As part of the training role in HR functions, we have examined development in terms of traditional learning interventions. Before we leave the development component, let's take a look at how training and HR can take further steps together.

As we've discussed, development is a primary role for training, but there are ways that HR and

training can cross in this important function. We've looked at more traditional forms of development, so now let's examine other development avenues for training and HR.

One of the first avenues for employee development is through career paths and curriculum development. In terms of curriculum, training is usually going to work with managers, supervisors, and the people who do the jobs in order to determine what competencies or skills are included in training programs. This in itself is a form of development, but consider taking it a step further to career paths. The career path is essentially a collection of curricula that make up the most logical steps in an employee's development. This could mean moving from one position to another within one area of expertise, or taking a logical step into another area. For example, call center employees can logically move into supervisory roles from lower positions, but in some situations they can also move into roles such as analysis or quality assurance. With career paths, HR is the training department's definite partner. HR can tell you which positions people are moving to and from, as well as how department and division managers envision those career steps. In addition, just as you can give feedback on success in new hire training, HR can provide a profile of who works best when promoted into certain roles. For example, the call center supervisors may be more people oriented, whereas the quality assurance position may require more analytical skill. Career paths that are developed as a partnership with HR will be accurate and will also help increase the credibility of the training program as a whole.

Next, coaching and mentoring are also "crossroads" for HR and training. Keep in mind that coaching and mentoring are two separate components of both formal and informal development. Coaches typically focus on a particular piece of performance, such as a certain set of skills or functions, whereas a mentor takes a general focus in helping a

person with his or her career path and general career skills. When you look at a coaching program, much of your information may come from the people on the jobs and their supervisors. These groups typically know what skills are missing from an associate's "toolbox" and in many cases can take over as coaches. Coaching can be formal or informal, but a formal program can lead back to career paths, as an associate's performance and improvement is documented. In the case of a formal coaching program, HR and training can work together to track, change course, and reward both associates and their coaches.

In a mentoring arrangement, whether formal or informal, the focus becomes a person's overall progression and preparedness for career moves. With an effective set of career paths, HR and training can work together to monitor the mentor program, as well as to educate and train mentors on their roles. In fact, the mentor component is probably more of a crossover for HR than the coaching component. Because the mentor is focused on the overall career, HR can certainly lend a hand in preparing the program and helping it move forward.

Other informal routes for development may exist as joint ventures between HR and training. For example, the mentor program may include a social networking component such as a discussion board, blog, or chat feature. If this is the case, HR and training together can monitor the social network and ensure that information is accurate and appropriate for that medium. HR and training features such as career paths can also be part of an informal or formal social network. The key with such interventions is to make sure exchanges are monitored. With a joint venture between HR and training, you can assure that information is monitored and that moderators present the perspectives of both departments.

The final area where training and HR can work together is retention, so we will look at the

general and leadership levels for ideas in this component of employee development.

6: General Retention

Summary: Both human resources and training can have a big impact on employee retention. In our discussion of training roles in HR, we will discuss both general retention and retention on the leadership level.

In terms of retention, HR and training can work both together and separately to ensure that the talent acquisition cycle does not have to run repeatedly for the same groups or positions. In general, retention from the training perspective involves fine-tuning and monitoring all programs, as well as using those training programs as a potential source of advertising for retention. Let's take a look at how the training department can assist HR with employee retention.

One of the first items to look at in regard to general retention is new hire training. Obviously evaluation of new hire training should be a continuous operation for the training department, but don't forget to evaluate the managers who supervise new hires. You should certainly evaluate new hire performance via their supervisors, but be sure to examine the program itself from the managers' perspectives. In other words, ensure that new hire training is what the managers need. If you are teaching the wrong skills or the wrong procedures that lead to the skills, new hires and managers are likely to misconnect. And unhappy new hires tend to be in great danger of leaving. Of course, a new hire who just wasn't the right fit will eventually self-select anyway, but you definitely don't want those perfect fits leaving because they did not get the training they needed. New hires' managers can give you quite a bit of insight on how well prepared they are.

Next, consider cross training as a retention tool. This is another area where you'll want to get buy in from both HR and managers, but in

today's environment this may be fairly easy. Cross training does not necessarily mean that training or line managers are attempting to prove an excess of staff. It simply means that employees can learn to do more with less staff - and to be prepared to take over wherever needed. But how is cross training a retention tool? Employees with more knowledge about the organization and its operations are more likely to stick around.

Also, be sure to "listen" to training evaluations. In any discussion of training evaluation, we know that an evaluation, at whatever level, is useless unless you do something with it. For the most part, trends in training evaluation are telling you something and you should act upon that knowledge. As your programs are constantly aligned with employees and jobs, you'll find that this alignment may impact retention.

Another way to look at general retention through training is to truly examine the bottom line. In today's economic environment, it's likely that training managers are forced to do this anyway. But look at the competencies your programs teach and figure out how those have impacted the organization. For example, is customer service better? Is turnover in certain positions lower or higher than this time a year ago or two years ago? Have operational errors become lower? If you can link training to these items, you may also impact retention.

Finally, try to make training as accessible as possible. If certain programs lend themselves to online delivery, take the plunge and make the change. Employees need access to information and training at all times, but, as we've discussed, many of them are being asked to take on more responsibility in the same amount of work time. If you can cut out travel to and from a training location, not to mention time away for the duration of training, this is also a positive impact on retention. Consider alternative methods to training, as well. For example, we've discussed social media roles in

training, as well as coaching and mentoring. The combination of these methods can push knowledge out and ensure that the workforce stays focused - and happy on the job.

In regard to HR, be sure to get the department involved in advertising training - and using it as a retention tool. As part of recruitment and selection, the training program can be a big draw, especially if a potential employee understands that he or she will have a career path and the training interventions to support it.

Next, we will finish our series on training roles in HR functions with a discussion of retention at the leadership level.

6: Leadership Retention

Summary: In our final discussion of training roles in HR, we will examine retention at the leadership level.

Retention can be a difficult task for employees at any level, but retention at leadership levels can be more difficult. As employees develop their leadership styles and abilities, new doors may begin to open for them. Through networks and industry knowledge, high professional and high potential leaders have knowledge of positions that the generally public may not have. For these reasons, it is necessary for us to take a closer look at the training role in retaining leaders.

One of the first points in leadership retention is similar to our first point in general retention: ensure that new managers and supervisors have all of the tools they need to be successful. Your best subject matter expert, aside from managers and supervisors themselves, may be human resources. For example, many organizations create a course package that includes HR law and policies, the hiring process, the corrective action process, and the HR documentation process. After supervisors move

through this package, they can move on to deeper management and leadership instruction.

Leadership and management are the next two components of the training role in retention. Both poor management and poor leadership can lead to a loss of employees, especially if those employees are fairly new with the organization. In terms of management, training should be ongoing and cover operations, financial, personnel, and project management, as well as motivation and influence. Leadership, on the other hand, is an opportunity to explore what characteristics successful leaders have within your organization and establish programs that create those characteristics. This is where HR and training can collaborate to create not only the leadership program competencies but also the plans for building an effective leadership bench.

Keep in mind that retaining leaders through training does not necessarily have to be confined to managers and supervisors, especially in this economic environment. Some organizations have come to rely on their lateral leaders because of a lack of promotional opportunities. In other words, you should definitely keep an eye on the people who lead as colleagues and would be great additions to the leadership bench. To do this, consider adding training interventions that target this high potential audience. Topics can include leading laterally, teamwork, taking the lead in ambiguous situations, and even industry or organizational knowledge pieces. This vital population should not only be retained but should be prepared to step into management roles when they become available. In fact, some organizations choose lateral leaders to go into the management course package or the leadership pool both to retain them and to get them ready to move up.

Another way to retain leaders is to ensure that managers are involved in the training department's efforts, from the bottom to the top. Pay special attention to career paths and

job-based curricula that highlight the path for mobility. By doing this, the leaders will understand that they can be succeeded if necessary and that they can use the career path as a motivational tool. When leaders get involved in the advertising of training, you are creating another way to retain them, as well.

In this series, we have examined the role training plays in HR functions, namely recruiting, employee selection, development, and retention. The training role in these functions can be direct or indirect, depending on your organization and its structure. It's also important to remember that no assistance with HR functions should be unwanted or forced. One of the ways to ensure this is to understand how training can help and offer assistance as it's necessary. Alternatively, consider meeting with HR on a regular basis to determine where they are and what they need. But also keep in mind that your assistance will come at a cost to your own projects and initiatives, so this is a space where your ability to balance will come in handy. Finally, remember that the current environment is calling on all of us to do more with less - and this is a great marketing perspective for involving training in some human resources functions.

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