



What Do We Get From Learning?

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As part of SEDCOR's alliance with Cascade Employers Association, this feature appears periodically in the Enterprise. Cascade provides employment knowledge and support in the areas of human resource management, employment law compliance, training, pay information, safety and employee benefits.

Learn anything today? Sure, you did! We learn lots every day even if we aren't paying attention. Our brain is absorbing tons of data and messages, trying to make sense of it all. Our emotions are putting a value on that data – mostly, "I don't care..." But sometimes our intuition is experiencing excitement, fear or curiosity. The questions for leaders are: How can we best shape learning to meet our personal, organizational and customer needs? How do we move in a V formation from passive disinterest to commitment? How do we help less adventurous people transition from the familiar to the foreign, especially when they feel that they lost something? How do we maintain stability while challenging the status quo; i.e., find the balance of comfort and discomfort, the optimum of efficiency and innovation?

Learning can be our competitive advantage.

A prime purpose of training is to focus learning on how employees can make a difference. Knowledge, skills and understanding are only part of training's impact. Training helps employees commit to what is important.

Motivators: Let's start with basic human needs. We all want to be secure, cared about (have very good relationships) and clear that we are making a valuable difference. Yet in surveys, managers rate appreciation and making a difference at the bottom of employees' priorities, while employees put it at the top, even above good wages. The externals such as money, pretty buildings and fancy offices are no substitute for being valuable, valued and meaningfully involved.

The **Gallup Organization** did the most in-depth research in history on which employee perceptions make the most difference to profits, productivity, customer loyalty and employee retention. Among the top twelve were:

- There is someone at work who encourages my development.
- I know what is expected of me at work.
- This last year, I had opportunities at work to learn and grow.

Alignment: So tying learning to goals and development is a powerful way to increase productivity and profits (remember profits?). Training is not simply about content and achieving specific learning objectives. It is also about alignment and motivation. If our organizations invest in our learning, we learn how to be part of the team and how to win the game. We appreciate how to build on each others' strengths and how to be open about our limitations. Once we have a foundation of trust (Cf: Patrick Lencioni, Five Dysfunctions of a Team), conflicts become less a barrier to work and more a way to frame constructive problem solving.

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Retention of the Best: While retention is not the problem it was a year ago, organizations are more likely to keep their losers and eventually lose their best employees if the stimulation of learning is not valued. Employees who leave their organizations usually cite "better pay" or "a better opportunity" but the real reasons they leave include their supervisors' limitations as a leader, a feeling they aren't appreciated (high achievers especially crave feedback) and a lack of learning opportunities. Young people particularly see learning as their way to achieve job security and to engage their organization in challenging ways.

There are many excuses not to train. "We're busy." "We're cutting back." "Training is a distraction from our to-do list." So how do we foster workforce development without sacrificing vital resources such as time and money? How we spend our time and money is a message about whether we are in this for the long haul, whether we want just to survive or to thrive.

But we are not here to make high-priced consultants rich. It is only good sense to use low cost strategies that work and lend themselves to better follow-up, including customized association-provided training, community college courses and online learning.

Learning Styles: If you look at four energy styles – Logic, Relationship, Grounded and Creative – each one resonates differently with training. The high Logic person likes to understand how things work, including people. The high Relationship style is motivated by joint commitments and participative experiences. The high Grounded person wants clear expectations and guidelines. The high Creative learner wants the bigger picture, more options and new challenges.

Also to be considered are learning styles such as the Reflective Observer versus the Active Experimenter. Some people like to jump right in and others need lots of context before they want to risk trying the new. Trainers need to customize their training for the organization and the learner.

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