

Training by the senses

BY: MERGE GUPTA-SUNDERJI

“This is the fourth complaint I’ve received this week about the two new summer employees you hired in the garden centre,” objected Roger Abbott, manager of Purple Onion Nurseries. “Yes, I know,” replied a frustrated senior supervisor Neeta Singh. “They each received two full weeks of training, the same amount we give all new employees,

but they’re still making serious mistakes in plant care and giving customers incorrect advice.”

Perhaps you’ve found yourself in a situation similar to the one that Neeta faces – your employee received training, yet he still doesn’t perform the job to the levels you expect. Despite what you may think, it may not be your employee’s fault. One of the most common reasons employees don’t do their jobs well is because they weren’t adequately trained. How can you tell? There are two key concepts to consider if you want to ensure your employees are sufficiently trained.

TRAINING ACTION PLAN

First, recognize that effective training must contain three components – “tell,” “show” and “try.” I often illustrate this concept in seminars by asking a volunteer from the audience to describe to me how to put on my jacket, and I then follow the instructions word for word. Invariably, as I get twisted up in the garment, the audience discovers that this is harder than they originally thought! Sooner or later, someone from the audience will offer to show me how to put on the jacket while demonstrating with his or her own coat. And finally, someone will volunteer to come up to the front of the room and help me put on my jacket. The point of the illustration: people learn best when they have all three components present – tell, show and try. Just telling me how to put on my jacket is not effective; however, when combined with a demonstration that I can observe and an opportunity to try it myself, the training becomes successful.

Now consider your non-performing employee. Is it just possible that he didn’t receive all three components? In my experience, much training happens on the fly. Departments are usually short-staffed and there is pressure to get the new employee out on the floor and contributing fully as soon as possible. As a result, the rookies get masses of information, an opportunity for some practice, they’re assigned a “buddy” who they can ask questions of if necessary, and



Tailoring training to the employee's needs will improve customer service.

then they're on their own. Far too often, training contains lots of "tell," some aspects of "show" and limited (if any) parts of "try." Yet, effective training *must* contain *all* three components.

The second key concept is that not only should employees receive all three components, but each factor must be at levels appropriate for that individual employee. Individual employees have different learning styles, and thus there is no such thing as a "one size fits all" training program. Experts agree there are three major learning styles — auditory, visual and tactile. Auditory learners are the most responsive to the "tell" part of training, visual learners to the "show" part, and tactile learners relate to the "try." The first key concept of effective training is that *all* people need *all three* components; however, different employees require different levels of each. Auditory learners are good at synthesizing and absorbing information simply by listening. They are the ones who can learn successfully even when training is skewed towards the "tell." Visual learners need to see it — they do better with training that has tasks they can watch. And tactile learners need to touch and feel to learn — getting involved and trying the process to successfully learn the task.

IF IN DOUBT, ASK

Once again, consider your non-performing employee. Is he primarily an auditory, visual, or tactile learner? How can you tell? One way is to ask. You will usually get a straightforward answer. Another way is to listen to the verbs the employee uses. Auditory learners tend to use verbs such as hear, listen, and talk; visual learners use verbs like look, see, picture and imagine; and tactile learners say feel, touch, hold and move. Once you've determined the predominant style of your employee, adjust the training to fit. I'm not suggesting that you develop a different training program for every employee. Just recognize that the

levels of each factor (tell, show and try) will vary from employee to employee, and you (and your employee) will achieve greater success if the training is tailored to the employee's learning strength. **LT**

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