

## Don't Forget the Training

04/07/08

We have some training to get through, and we never seem to get to it. It's important that we do, as completing this training will help us with both sales and customer service. It seems like we're always busy with other things. Do you have any suggestions for us?

Everyone in the organization needs to regularly go through some kind of training to improve skills and keep from getting stale. It is so easy to get caught up in the day to day activities of the business. We get into a groove, and focus on comfortable habits. That often means that training and skill building get left to the end of the day, week, month, and then don't happen.

There are some simple things that this business owner can do make training happen. Define the requirements. Set up structure. Regularly check in. Discuss what's happening as a result of training. Ask for suggestions. Note progress. So, let's get started with the details.

Make a list of what training has to happen. Start with individual and department requirements for skill building. Look for areas where errors or low productivity show up consistently. Don't forget to include any major software or equipment upgrades requiring skill development in order to function effectively.

Figure out where and when to train. In today's internet world, a lot of training can be done via the office computers. Webinars and CD based instruction are both relatively inexpensive to participate in and highly profitable for the training company – a win-win. Offsite training is more expensive but sometimes there's no choice.

Do people need to learn as a group or as individuals? Can everyone be off work at the same time? Who will cover when people are out for training? How much of the burden for training depends on individual willingness to pick up skills on personal time?

Remember that we retain 15% of what we hear, 50% of what we write and hear, and 85% of what we write, hear and play back. Make sure that training includes all three – listening, writing, and opportunity to play it back and practice.

Are there any special requirements? Language is often a barrier for employees who use English as a second language. Some people are auditory learners while others are tactile or visual learners. Students' ability to pick up skills will depend on how much they can absorb, which will depend on whether they can get training that fits their learning style.

Define what has to be taught, and how much time will be allowed for

everyone to get up to speed. Do you have a week, a month or a year to build skills? What's realistic, given that the business has to continue to operate as well?

Map out a schedule. Get as specific as possible. Define steps that have to be accomplished each week, each month. Whether training is on- or offsite, put one person in charge. Take notes about training progress, so you can have a benchmark for next time.

Make it clear that you expect everyone to attend, arrive early, take it seriously, be attentive, and stay for the entire session. Set goals for what you expect people to get out of training. Be clear you'll be checking up on progress throughout.

Encourage participation in training by having regular discussion sessions. Ask participants how they will apply what they're learning to their day-to-day work. Give everyone time to process what they're going through.

Regularly ask about the basics. Is the group on track? Who is in charge of making adjustments and keeping the calendar up to date? Are there problems that crop up? Is the group progressing, or falling further and further behind in which case you need to evaluate if it's the group or the training.

# AskAndi

Trusted Advisor to Business Owners

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Schedule progress checks at short, regular intervals. Weekly meetings are a good way to find out what's going on. Listen carefully to what people are getting out of the training and pay attention to complaints. Try to distinguish between discomfort related to change – which many people find hard to take at first – and real challenges to making training stick.

Ask participants to make suggestions on how to make training even more relevant. Listen carefully to suggestions and concerns, even if you think they're not worthwhile. Do ask people to apply what they're learning to making things better, rather than allowing people to get stuck in complaining about what they don't like. Giving people time to vent can be helpful when they're trying to bust through roadblocks. Even if it's too late for this group, make notes on how to do it better for the next group.

Looking for a good book? Try, *The First Time Trainer, A Step-By-Step Quick Guide for Managers, Supervisors, and New Training Professionals* by Tom. W. Goad.

*advice on how to grow profitable, successful companies. They find what they need time after time. Specific advice is available at [www.AskAndiBlog.com](http://www.AskAndiBlog.com). Ask Andi is also published weekly in the Westchester and Fairfield County Business Journals and Hudson Valley Business. Written by Strategy Leaders President, Andi Gray, the Ask Andi column is a rich source of advice for owners of established, privately held businesses.*

*If you are a business owner and you have a question or would like to discuss some aspect of your business, call [1.877.238.3535](tel:1.877.238.3535) or send an email to [AskAndi@StrategyLeaders.com](mailto:AskAndi@StrategyLeaders.com).*

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