

WORKPLACE MATTERS

Ways to improve employee training while staying within budget

During a downturn, worker training is often the first casualty as businesses tighten their belts. But to be successful, companies must continually develop their people, especially leaders, even when business is off.



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Strategic training investments can help increase market share and improve customer service and efficiency.

So what are some smart training investments during a recession? Leadership training in areas such as strategic

planning, innovation and new product development can provide valuable insights and tools for surviving a downturn. Sales training, particularly in up-selling and cross promotion, can help companies break into new markets. Customer service training can build the customer base, while helping retain existing customers. Quality training can reduce waste and the need to re-do work, and improve customer satisfaction.

The Lane Community College Business Development Center is experiencing a high demand for its business training services.

"We've had a huge demand for leadership training. In fact, this past fall, our walls were bursting at the seams," said Shirl Meads, operations manager for the center. The center's computer training classes are also popular. "We're finding that when production is slower, companies take folks off the production line to get them up to speed on computer skills."

NW Stamping, a machine shop in Eugene, is investing in quality training. Human Resources Director Mandi McDougall said it "improves individual productivity and directly contributes to company profitability and growth through improved efficiencies and reduced loss."

So how can a business maintain that bottom line without redlining the training budget? Here are some creative ways to train employees:

Use a "train the trainer" model.

Invest in training for several key employees and have them train or mentor others.

Purchase training materials made for a group setting: Quality DVDs or Web-based seminars can replace more costly one-on-one training.

Share training expenses with other companies: Many trainers charge by the class and can accommodate 20 to 30 people. Sharing costs with another company can reduce the overall costs for each company.

Bring training in-house: Bringing a trainer to the company, reduces travel costs and downtime.

Make employee training hands-on: This can reduce downtime and allow employees to be productive while they learn. Employees or outside vendors can develop on-site training that can be incorporated into real work tasks. For example, rather than sending an employee to outside Excel training, an in-house expert could train employees to improve real Excel documents.

Make sure the training is customized: Invest training money so it suits your company's unique needs. Lane Community College's Customized Employee Training Program can tailor training to fit specific needs and budget requirements. It can be reached at (541) 463-5255.

Provide ongoing support to ensure that the training sticks: The key to getting value from an investment in training is to fully integrate the new skills into the workplace. This cannot be achieved from a one-day workshop. Consider instituting a weekly brown bag or other regular activities to cement the new learning.

Monitor the return on investment: Establish some benchmarks or some other way to measure the training program's success. This feedback allows businesses to make better, data-driven decisions in the future and to justify training budgets to a finance committee or the CEO.

Nurture employees' talent: During times of economic uncertainty this is more important than ever. Developing employees internally will ensure a competent, skilled work force and leaders who are able to see the big picture and act in the company's best interest as they face today's opportunities and challenges.

What they learn today will also benefit businesses in the future. It's an investment that will pay dividends, today and tomorrow.

If you have questions about training your work force, contact Robin Onaclea, business service coordinator at Lane Workforce Partnership, at robino@laneworkforce.org or (541) 682-7224.