
The Mathis Group's

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Training For Performance

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All organizations and supervisors from time to time have employees who struggle because of their inability to perform up to the standard that is required. When this happens, supervisors usually discipline the employees. In most instances, they do not take the time to discover why the performance is unacceptable.

It is critical today for managers to determine the real reasons for poor performance. Unless the root cause is addressed, the poor performance will likely resurface. Unfortunately, companies often terminate good employees who could be kept if we took the time to identify and address the root causes of their failure.

What is preventing us from solving the real problem? We may assume employees are not willing to perform up to the standard, or we may think they are lazy. In many instances, we act on these assumptions without verifying our thinking.

Performance problems will continue to reoccur until we take care of the underlying causes. Terminating employees should not be our personal goal or the goal of the organization. Management's goal must be to turn the employee around. To help us do that, let's examine some reasons why an employee's performance may be inadequate.

Employees will perform at a low level if they are not thoroughly trained in all aspects of their job.

One of most common assumptions leaders make is that employees are trained and know what they should be doing. If this supposition is incorrect it can easily lead to premature and inappropriate discipline. It is important, therefore, to recognize how false assessments are made so we can guard against them.

Leaders believe the employee's resume or application.

Applications and resumes give workers an opportunity to highlight their positive skills. It is human nature when completing an application or writing a resume to avoid the mention of weaknesses. Knowing that such information might

prevent an employer from being interested in hiring them, it is understandable that the prospect would leave the negative information out of the resume. The picture is further distorted when people exaggerate their strengths and abilities.

Leaders sometimes assume workers have knowledge and skill because they want to avoid investing money to train them.

Organizations often run on a tight budget. Because of this, they may be reluctant to invest in training. When that is the case, the success of an employee depends on how fast he or she can catch on to new duties. This "learn as you do" approach is optimistically called "on the job training."

In deciding about training, the question to ask is, "Will the employee benefit significantly from what the training was designed to teach? Will this training opportunity increase the employee's performance?" You might be thinking, "It takes time to train employees, and we can't afford to have them away from their jobs that long."

D.L. Moody, a minister of another era, said, "It is better to train 10 people than to do the work of 10 people. But it is harder." (7700 illustration, p.721) Regardless of the organization, we should equip our people to perform to the best of their ability. This investment will give us the time to fulfill our leadership responsibility of motivating and mentoring others.

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Delay is preferable to error.

*Thomas Jefferson
3rd U.S. President*

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Leaders assume that if employees have been sent to training they are trained.

In many instances, we send people to training, but we do not debrief them on what they learned or how they will use their new knowledge and skill. While we might wish it to be otherwise, simply watching a video in a classroom does not necessarily guarantee that the viewer leaves with a new skill or with greater subject mastery.

Unfortunately, leaders sometimes assume that when individuals have been exposed to a video on a subject they have been adequately trained. Any qualified educator will tell you that is not the case.

Effective training typically involves hearing, seeing, and doing. When we leave one of these out, we compromise the likelihood that the participant will master and retain the skills or concepts that are presented.

Leaders often assume people will meet performance standards and maintain consistency.

Consistency is important if we are to maintain quality and move the organization in a particular direction. As we have seen, managers can no longer assume that employees know what to do if they have not been trained.

We must understand each employee's skill level. Furthermore, we must work with each employee to insure that standards are consistently met.

Wise leaders help workers avoid as many unnecessary and costly mistakes as possible. This is normally done through coaching and monitoring as well as training.

As one adage says, "If people learn from their mistakes, many are getting a fantastic education." We can certainly learn from our mistakes, and there is a place for on the job training. Yet, it usually makes more sense and is ultimately more cost effective to train employees so that they do the job right and prevent mistakes from happening.

Leaders often assume that if employees think they know a skill, they do.

What about the person who thinks he or she has the high level of knowledge required for a particular job? Is it safe to assume this person has no need for training? Not necessarily.

It is important not to throw training at problem areas without considering what needs to be accomplished. Leaders should utilize training to help employees grow.

Managers will find it valuable to monitor and benchmark the performance of each individual. When they do this, supervisors can use training to develop the employee in his or her areas of need.





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