
A Baker's Dozen - Reasons Why Employee Training Fails

by John Tschohl, President, Service Quality Institute - December 30, 2013

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Most of the money and time companies spend on training is wasted. That's because the majority of companies use outdated training ideas and boring training methods.

Training that is poorly presented goes in one ear and out the other. It's no wonder employees don't change their attitudes or behaviors after they attend a badly presented training session.

After working in the training field for more than 40 years on six continents, I've seen 13 reasons (a Baker's Dozen) why group training fails:

1. Large groups: You can't have a good group discussion if 100 people are in the room. Try to limit training sessions to 15 people so everyone has a chance to participate. If the group size is larger, most employees will not participate and hence will not change their behaviors or learn new skills.
2. A small number of people dominate the conversation: It's natural in groups for three people to speak up while everyone else stays silent. Facilitators must call on everyone in the room to participate. If people don't talk, they won't buy into the training goals.
3. Stupid games: People don't like role-playing games. Games and exercises have to do with something that builds success as a team. People need to be actively involved in the exercise.
4. Complicated training materials: If the material is not easily understood, it will not be implemented. Make sure the information is easily comprehended. Test the material on several small groups. Make adjustments and then roll out the final version to the entire organization.
5. Facilitator dominated: Facilitators should be seen and seldom heard. They should steer the conversation, but they should not dominate the discussion. They should ask leading questions of the participants and make sure everyone talks at some time. The facilitator is a juggler. He/she needs to keep the conversation going. The more discussion there is, the more likely attitudes and behaviors will improve.
6. Lectures: Remember how you fell asleep when boring professors spoke in college? Your employees are no different. Lectures are not an effective way to get people to change their attitudes and beliefs.
7. Irrelevant Information: If the material is not relevant to their jobs, people will not accept the information. They want ideas they can use immediately.
8. Bad physical environment: Learning can't take place if people are not comfortable. Invest in a room that looks pleasant and professional. It sounds basic, but make sure the room is well heated or cooled and has comfortable seats. Offer refreshments. Add audio and video presentation equipment. Make sure there aren't any outside distractions, such as noise.
9. Not offering enough training sessions: If training isn't offered regularly, skills won't be learned and attitudes

will not change. Consider offering training every four months. Companies need to reinforce and refresh training every few months with something new. A one-shot program will have one-shot results.

10. Repeating the same training programs and materials: A child can watch the same program 50 times, but an adult can't watch the same training materials twice. Companies need to bring in new trainers who have new information and different teaching styles. Companies should also invest in new training materials to spice things up.

11. Not having supplemental training materials: People learn by using a variety of techniques. Good training techniques require that discussions be supplemented with videos and reading materials that can reinforce the message. The old saying, "A picture is worth 1,000 words" is even more relevant in today's video age.

12. Not taking today's young people's learning styles into mind: The vast majority of workers are young people. They learn differently than previous generations and they get bored easily. Look at the games they play on their phones. They want to be entertained. If the training isn't entertaining, you lose the participation.

Training costs a lot of money and takes a lot of time. Labor time is your single biggest cost. If the listening switch for participants is off you waste all your money. If you do it right, then training is a wise investment. If you make mistakes, it will hurt the company and the employees.

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