IT Takes a Village: Employees Training... by Employees

Unless training is made compulsory by your organization, one may find that there are dwindling numbers of employees who are willing to participate. This may be due to limited training programs that only cover basic areas such as sexual harassment, violence in the workplace, and compliance training. Training and development that helps to grow people for life rather than just in the workplace has become integral.

Millennials are quickly becoming one of the most important segment of the workforce as they begin to make up an ever-increasing percentage of it, and they put a premium on trainings that emphasize not only professional growth but also personal growth. If we want to retain qualified employees, we ought to ensure that they are excited about going to work. Soft benefits like personal development programs and professional training courses can go a long way in retaining and growing the talent within your organization.

Examples of training programs in Adams County, Colorado and the City of Decatur, Georgia follow:

**ImpactAdams – Adams, Colorado**

Three major components:

1. **YOU** - how do we train employees and teach them skillsets that they don't have?
2. **US** - how do we build teams and develop the next generation of leaders?
3. **WE** - how do we connect to our community?

---

**EvolveU**

- University-style program
- Catalog of classes in both print and online
- Offered Enhanced Training in 21st century skills such as public speaking, negotiation, assertiveness, conflict management, and time management.
- Used Advanced Training tools by leveraging phone apps, prezi, social media, etc.
- Offered Elective Courses for personal enrichment
- Lifehacks: Trained employees to train others to foster a culture of inspiration

**Develop Us**

- Mentoring and succession planning was instituted
- Striving to enhance retention rates, this program targeted at employees with less than two years’ time within the organization
- Mentorship programming is built out for approximately six-months with the view that relationships may change over time
- Coaching and facilitating was also offered to identify employee strengths and enhance communication techniques

**WeCare**

- Issued an Administrative Directive allowing for all employees to volunteer for eight paid hours each month with a local non-profit of their choice
- Has resulted in over 400 hours of donated time
- Leadership is beginning to see the benefit of time spent in the community.
- Leaders need to see the benefit of using city resources in this manner for the program to be successful
- This program was the first to be instituted because it was already well formed
E5 Leadership Development – Decatur, GA

The City of Decatur’s journey towards improved employee training programs began with their enrollment in the Alliance’s Innovation Academy. As part of the Academy they identified that city staff were their greatest asset and should be the focus of their class project. The City designed a new training program by first asking themselves what a training program ought to strive for. They identified the following goals:

1. Reduce barriers between departments
2. Train employees to become leaders
3. Prepare employees for promotion

The Five E’s stand for “engaged, effective, excellent, and evolved employees.” To help the City progress toward their goals, employees had to understand the organization’s vision and be able to answer the question, “Why does the city engage in certain activities?” Using the Strategic Plan was especially useful in this endeavor.

Furthermore, program designers had to identify where communication broke down. The goals were to identify problems while remaining solutions-oriented and sharing ideas across the organization to eliminate silos.

Creation of the E5 Academy took the following components:

1. Designing curriculum that could be used both personally and professionally.
2. The Main Building Blocks:
   a. Class size of 12 employees that have been with the organization for two year or more and are not five years out from retirement
   b. Emergenetics profile to help employees understand themselves and one another.
   c. Team/trust building activities (e.g. Lunch Selfie Challenge, Amazing Race)
   d. Each team was assigned an innovation and vision project that would enhance the city in some way
      i. They each identified a coach with expertise in their project focus that would assist in their final presentation
      ii. Also, allowed for an educational component that taught employees the logic behind the annual budget
3. Budget
   a. The total budget came out to $6,989 which included materials, personality test, E5 “swag bag,” team building activities, two coaching sessions, and an offsite orientation and graduation day
   b. Costs can be reduced by using free, online personality tests, opting out of the “swag bag,” or using in-house employees or volunteer experts for coaching sessions.

Challenges

A few challenges that each program faced was breaking down the perception that HR ought to be the universal trainer, getting buy-in from leadership, and questions about whether or not resources were being used wisely. Scheduling the time for training and finding a willingness to participate were also identified as key barriers. The biggest challenge in Decatur was simply getting employees to see the benefit of additional education.

But the cost of doing nothing is watching people waiting to retire. Impact Adams resulted in increased attendance at training opportunities and are taking steps to help people grow for life. Decatur has seen the results of increased exposure of employees to different departments, resulting in more effective workplace interactions and improved relationships among staff.