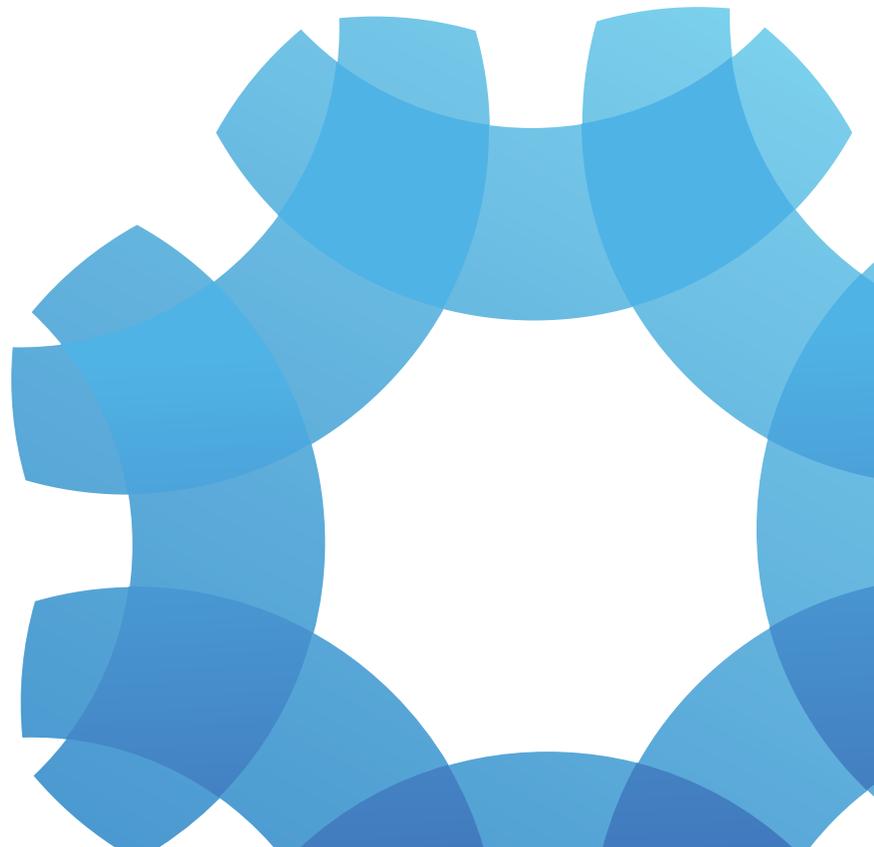# 6 TIPS
FOR SUCCESSFULLY TRAINING A
DISTRIBUTED WORKFORCE

THE GUIDE TO FINDING THE
BEST EMPLOYEE TRAINING SOLUTION FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

According to a publication by elearningindustry.com, an estimated 25% of employees leave their job because they don't have a full understanding of how to complete the work they've been assigned and aren't provided with any kind of on-the-job training. Flip to the other side of the coin, and those organizations that do offer training and development see an increase of 26% more revenue per employee.

Now, imagine that kind of increase across every area of your business model. A 26% increase in revenue per employee, per location, per year, multiplied by every line of business in the organization.

It adds up.

Until recent years, few organizations have really understood the impact that training and development has on an organization's bottom line. Traditionally, initiatives to increase profitability relied on strenuous additions of more demanding sales quotas, or harsh cuts to peripheral line items. Far too many companies focus all of their attention on selling more product units, without considering the potential growth opportunity with their existing workforce.

The American Society of Training And Development (now the Association for Talent Development) released this quote in their annual State of the Industry Report:

> *"Organizations are linking learning to performance and the bottom line, and they understand the relationship between creating a skilled workforce and achieving enterprise-wide success. Employee learning and development is taking center stage as business leaders increasingly understand that a highly skilled, knowledgeable workforce is critical to achieving growth and success."*

The ironic thing is, in times of economic scarcity, many companies are quick to draw back from employee development - disinvesting in training in an effort to maintain profit goals. This is a short-sighted approach because ultimately the failure to invest in employees translates to decreases in profitability.

Chances are, if you're reading this, you're likely no stranger to the benefits of investing in training and developing your people. After all, that's why you're here. This ebook is designed to take a look at the many types of training that are available to your organization, and discover how to wade through the potential delivery options to find a solution that's best for your organization.

How A Customer Service Center Increased Profit With One Simple Training Technique

Not too long ago, one of the largest providers of wholesale auto parts in the nation acted on a simple idea that ultimately added tens of thousands of dollars to their bottom line.

With locations spread across the United States, this organization has historically employed thousands of customer service reps (CSRs), each of whom brings their unique background and experience to the table.

While reviewing operating expenses, the leadership team noticed that a significant amount of money was allocated each year for "wrong parts" sent to their customers. Though these mistakes weren't occurring at an unreasonable rate for a company of their size, it did beg the question, was there a way to reduce the amount of money spent replacing mis-sold radiators?

After some observation, this company realized that while certain CSRs mis-sold the parts on a regular basis, other CSRs had a perfect record. The challenge, the majority of their CSRs were trained by the manager at time of hiring. The result, inconsistency in the information that was delivered. By documenting and systematizing the practices followed by the people with a perfect record, they could transfer that information consistently to the rest of the organization.

In light of this realization, the only problem that remained was finding a way to cost-effectively retrain a large body of CSRs who were scattered across the United States, quickly.

3 Ways To Approach Training In Multiple Locations

While there are countless ways to get creative with the process of training employees who are distributed across multiple locations, we can generally break the options into three different methods.

The first method is on-location, in-person training. In other words, bringing everyone together and training them in the same room. Until recently, this has been the most common form of multi-location training. By flying employees or key managers into a centralized location, the company can create a training event that not only minimizes outside distractions, but also establishes a sense of collaboration and team-building. The biggest problem with this method is that it is without a doubt the most costly form of training. It requires event space, flight and hotel arrangements, training materials, and the cost of "offline" time for every employee involved. While immersion into a specific topic over the course of a few days may seem like a great option at the outset, history shows that this is not always the "stickiest" form. A large percentage of people attend a week-long training event only to forget much of the information discussed as soon as they're thrown back into their routine. Some studies on cognitive load theory (how much information the brain can absorb) show that retention rates just the Monday after a weeklong training event are less that 12%!

The second training method is to create a "mobile" training initiative. The initiative involves building a team of trainers and then sending them as a group to offer regional and on-site training to every company location. This is a more reasonable option is as it has the potential to cost less by bringing the information to the people both in travel costs and employee "down" time. It's important to know this option requires a significant initial investment to build out the training collateral, train the trainers and cover the costs incurred by the team's time on the road.

Unfortunately, effectiveness is still hamstringed by the same human constraints inherent with classroom style training discussed previously.

The third option for training a distributed workforce is to leverage all the options that fall under the category of "eLearning". These include techniques such as recorded webinars, computer based training (CBTs or eLearning), quick access video based training (think YouTube), and other forms of digital media that provide information to the workforce WHERE and WHEN they need it. There are a number of reasons so many companies are turning to eLearning: it is cost-effective, time-effective, it provides consistency, it is sustainable and scalable and with advances in design, it is emerging as a proven form of training that is MORE effective than live training classes! The costs to design, develop and distribute information through these channels are exponentially less expensive. One analysis determined that a company with just 1000 employees spent over 2000 a year per employee for live training. A designed and develop eLearning solution to deliver the EXACT same information reduced that cost to under $35 per employee.

6 Tips For Training A Distributed Workforce

Now that you understand the training options available to your organization, the question still remains, how do you go about actually building an effective training program for your people?

Here are six tips for successfully training a distributed workforce:

1. Answer this question: What are you trying to accomplish?

It may take a little brainstorming and research, but by identifying the specific business objective you want to change, you'll be on your way to building a training that can accomplish those goals.

It's easy to make assumptions about what needs to be trained, it's imperative that you expand your frame and look at the bigger picture. Organizations often jump to conclusions about what they need to fix, but have actually only identified the symptoms of a deeper root issue.

Take some time to define what "results" you want from your training. What is the needle you're trying to move? It's most likely performance, so what specific metric are trying to affect and by how much? In the case of the CSRs, "We want to decrease the amount of wrong parts sent in 2014 by 10%." In the case of engagement, "We want to increase the amount of participant information capture over 50% in 2014." In the case of automotive repair, "We would like to increase the average repair order by 7% in 2015." In the case of sales, "We would like to increase average sales order by 4% in Q4 2014." Compare these with – increase sales, enhance customer service or decrease cost – A clear goal will provide you with clear direction.

2. Uncover What's Going On In The Field

Now that you know the exact objective you want to reach, do the research to understand the "reality" of how this is playing out in your organization. Let's go back to those parts? Why are the wrong parts being sent? Where is the breakdown in the process? Who's doing this right? What's different? Here's what is great about this, all you have to do is go, watch, document and maybe ask a question or two. These are the basics of ethnography or observational research. It's an activity that will pay dividends during your development effort.

If you think about the diversity in your team, it's quite likely that there are some bright spots in your organization. We love the saying, "We ARE doing every right; we are just not doing it everywhere!" There are employees or areas of your company that are producing the results you want. What is different in their environment? What are their people doing differently? What aren't they doing? What's missing that's allowing them to perform better? You may (and often will) find that training is only half the issue. "I had NO idea that was happening…" is a pretty common comment after these events.

3. Gather or Create The Knowledge That Needs To Be Transferred

Once you understand the reality of the situation, you can identify the knowledge gap that needs to be filled. You can get the information by extracting it from those that it or by creating it with input from a diversity of perspective. Your Business Matter Experts have "institutional" knowledge that unfortunately exists only in their head. Find those people and watch them closely. You could interview them but chances are they can't articulate what they are doing because they are unconsciously aware, they are "auto pilot" they are so good at it. So watch them, ask questions like, "Why did you do that?" "When did you start doing that?" "Who taught you how to do that?" "What's the story behind this?" These are going to help them give you the insight you need to truly understand what you see.

If you are creating the information, be sure to gather together a group of people that are doing the job well. Help them to identify all the issues that are top of mind for them every day. These "duties" don't have a beginning or an end. Then understand the individual "tasks" that are required to fulfill the duties. Each task is usually a series of steps, a process or a procedure that can be followed and subsequently taught. Let's go back to our CSRs, one of their duties no-doubt is to "Provide Excellent Customer Service". Don't build a Customer Service Course, identify all the tasks your CSR does that results in "Excellent Customer Service". One of those tasks is, "Answer the Phone Properly" another may be "Identify Type of Customer" or "Identify Customer Need" – each of these tasks involves a series of steps, questions or procedures that, when combined, result in "Excellent Customer Service."

4. Understand Your Learner

At this point, you know what you're trying to accomplish and have uncovered the information needed to train your people toward that result. However, different people in your organization are going to be comfortable learning in a variety of ways. It's important to understand who these people are as individuals, what is their environment like, what are THEY trying to accomplish? Take some time to think about who your learner is and how they might learn best.

Is there a trend in demographics? Male/Female/Generation/Culture? What technology will best suit your audience? What voice? What style? How about their work environment? Is it conducive to the training event you are proposing? Does it give them the information when and how they need it? The answers to these questions will drive the design of your content and determine how you go about delivering it to your audience.

5. Consider The Logistics Of Implementing Your Training

Once you've decided the best method for delivering your training content, there are myriad considerations you'll want to address.

- **How might you share this content with your entire workforce?** This is where you what option will work best. The range of options available is significant and usually includes a blended training solution that leverages live training options, eLearning techniques and performance support for on the job.

- **How might you make sure the training gets noticed or used?** You can increase your adoption rate by getting your audience excited to participate in trainings. Helping the audience understand the benefit of the training is important. What's important to your learners? Is it enabling them to do their job better, creating less day-to-day stress, improved performance or growth opportunities? Countdowns to new training events, crowd comments and incentives are also great techniques for creating a "buzz" around the initiative.

- **Do you need to train in more than one language?** So many organizations are global in nature and multi-lingual efforts are common place. Your training initiative design and development can be largely impacted by how many languages it will be delivered in. It's important with these efforts to ensure your message doesn't get "lost in translation" literally. Therefore when translating it's important to incorporate "localization" into your effort. This is the practice of going beyond direct translation to ensure the delivery of your messages "intent".

- **How can you track the results of your training?** This is where most training initiatives fail. Go back to the start of this book … what are you trying to accomplish? What metric can you track coming into, leaving and after the training initiative? Most initiatives stop at the "smile" test. What did you think of our training? While this is good to know, what is more powerful is an understanding of one's performance coming into the event and how their performance changed over the short and long term post event. Let's revisit those CSRs.

  - **The training initiative resulted in a cost savings of $129,000 over a six month period, here's how:**

  - Individually 90% of individual CSRs who were identified as having a high number of failed customer interactions (FCIs) which is more than 30 in a six month period saw an instant reduction in FCIs post training event by an average of 50%.

  - Locally, a customer service center with over 80% of it's staff having taken the training has seen an average of 27% decrease in FCIs over a 6 month period.

  - Organizationally, the Customer Contact Center has seen a decrease in FCIs by a factor of 15% which approximates to 100 less "wrong parts" sent per month. Each instance costs the organization approximately $215.

6. Wash, Rinse, Repeat

In order to build a training system that is not only effective, but also maintains its relevance throughout the years, you'll need to continually develop your training, design it, deliver it, then test it and measure the performance you're getting. After all, what good is investing all of your resources into training that doesn't actually move that needle?

Don't be discouraged if it feels like you're not making progress as quickly as you originally hoped. This process can take 2-3 weeks or 2-3 years, depending on the scope of the process you're trying to build. We firmly believe that training is an event while learning and organizational shift are processes.

Implementing Your Program:
In-House Training vs. Outsourced Training

When considering the best option for implementing your next training, there are three things you want to take into account:

1. **The Scope of the Effort**
2. **The Frequency of Effort**
3. **Existing or Available Resources**

The immediate reaction for many organizations is that in-house training must be cheaper because it most likely uses the work of employees who are already being paid anyway. However, by the time you take into account the number of in-house hours spent creating a training program, the cost often far exceeds the number of hours it takes a training and development company to achieve the same - if not better - results. The material costs associated with creating a training (be it in-person, virtual, or otherwise) can also add up very quickly. Outsourcing often saves tens of thousands of dollars in salaries and benefits alone.

It's understandable, too, to think that creating and delivering training in-house provides better control over the creation and distribution of company content. And while it's true that creating content in-house may allow for quicker, more flexible changes, the involvement of an expert third party can lessen the need for pivots and development learning curves, thus providing greater control and efficiency.

Finally, hiring a professional training and development company eliminates or reduces the need to create an internal training department, and can relieve concerns around knowing whether or not you're "doing it right." The time saved by not putting your employees to work on developing training serves to keep them focused toward your business goals.

Moving Forward

If you're interested in speaking with a professional, full-service training and talent development company to help you uncover the best training solution for your organization, we are here to help. We have built our reputation by being a trusted resources to many and a strategic partner to those who wanted more.

At Tortal Training, we set ourselves apart from DIY options and other LMS companies with our history of customer education and proven effectiveness. We've designed training solutions from the simple eLearning lesson to the strategic overhaul of a corporate curriculum and talent development map. We work with organizations of all size who believe in the power of good training.

If you want your training to make a dramatic impact on your bottom line, then you need a partner who understands the intricacies of not only the training process, but also how people learn. We use strategic engagement to make sure that your training has the greatest effect on your people.

To start a conversation about how Tortal Training can help you reach your strategic business objectives, call us at (704) 323-8953.