

# Using Training to Drive Culture Change

Why would a successful and growing services organization launch a new employee training initiative at a time when its people and resources are already stretched to keep up with current business demands? After all, training programs could divert resources from running the business; they require taking people from their current jobs, which might reduce momentum and focus, and are often very difficult to 'sell' internally. So, what makes a new training initiative worth it?

## The Genesis

One of Global Partners' clients, a leader in the energy services segment, was faced with just such a dilemma. Nevertheless, as the Program Manager for the initiative later described it, "there really was no choice but to launch the new training curriculum for its sales and marketing people". The sense of urgency for the new training curriculum was provided by the Vice President of Sales and Marketing, who was frustrated by what he interpreted as a lack of organization, preparation and effective use of business development tools in his people's approach to their customers and prospects. In particular, sales and marketing lacked the necessary skills, tools and a structured approach to improving customer relationships and communication with decision makers at all levels.

## Objectives of the Strategic Business Development Program

Therefore, in 2004, the company set out to "create the industry's best trained marketing, business development and sales professionals at all levels" The company's vision was to create a highly skilled and motivated sales force that was aligned with the company's strategic business objectives. Executive sponsors of the initiative were also intent on supporting business development processes by creating a strong professional sales and marketing culture, based on empowering sales and marketing people to be value-added resources to their customers.

The name chosen for the program was the **Strategic Business Development Program**, reflecting the intention of aligning sales and marketing more closely with the strategy of the business. The total curriculum consisted of a broad offering of programs, which included classroom training, best practice site visits as well as self-paced and experiential learning. Participants would be selected, high potential individuals, who would participate over a four-year period, leading to a unique internal certification.

Like many industrial companies, this global leader recognized the opportunity to grow its business and at the same time delight its customers by providing outstanding value-adding services. Of course, shifting the thinking as well as the behavior of its sales and marketing people from equipment maintenance to a value-adding services orientation would require new skills, processes and supporting systems.

## **Approach**

The curriculum was built by soliciting ideas from both internal and external experts, practitioners and thought leaders and come up with a schedule that took shape through brainstorming, osmosis and deliberation. Eventually a course catalogue was created that met the demands of the participants and addressed the skills and behaviors that needed to be enhanced most urgently.

Global Partners' role in the development and delivery of the curriculum has been to provide its expertise in training experienced account managers in strategic sales, marketing and product management, focusing in particular on strategic thinking and winning competitive contracts.

Program courses provided by other experts include: understanding cultural differences, negotiation, and writing winning proposals. In addition, participants are visiting major company sites in the US and abroad to familiarize themselves with the entire organization's operation. Another unique aspect of the program is that seasoned managers within the company are leading some sessions themselves, which brings personal experience and highly practical insights to the groups.

Currently, business unit vice presidents nominate individuals whom they feel will particularly benefit from the sessions. Additionally, individuals can apply through these same executives and be considered alongside the pre-selected people.

## **Early Wins**

Most organizational change initiatives require a good deal of internal selling. Initially, managers were unsure of the need for more training or of the return on investment in people's time spent learning 'soft sales and marketing skills'. In addition, scheduling the time of people who work across the country represented a significant challenge. However, as early participants began to attest to the benefits of the program, managers became increasingly interested in ensuring that their high potential people be included in the program.

After one early program, a participant stated, "It makes sense – in 14 years I have not had a single training class that added value or was worth the money until now."

Another commented, "If all the other classes are as good as this one, this could possibly be the best set of training I have ever had."

As word spread of the positive impact of the program, gaining commitment from managers became increasingly easy.

## **Measurable Results**

Besides the anecdotal evidence and testimonials, other measurable results from the program have been achieved. Program participants are meeting the business objectives set as part of each course and the program is credited by both participants and their managers for positively impacting performance. In addition, surveys and testing has verified that the learning has been applied in daily work. The next stage of the program will include an additional set of measures derived from surveying the participants and managers well after their participation to determine how the program impacts long-term performance.

Another particularly noteworthy result has been the upward mobility experienced by many of the early participants. Their promotions have been linked to attending the program, and these individuals have indicated that the skills learned paid off for them as well as for the entire organization. In addition, major customer activities have been enhanced through for the use of new skills.

## **Next Steps**

Needless to say, ongoing tuning and refining of the program is done to ensure that the content stays up to date and includes key learning from past sessions. Another issue is continuously sifting out the less than satisfactory elements in order to make room for new programs. A major organizational challenge is managing the level of control and influence from the central corporate group. In most global organizations, corporate headquarters, in this case European based, would wish to determine the priorities and content within certain subject areas. These points are being worked out stage by stage, through an on-going review committee and process.

Lastly, is the whole aspect of institutionalizing the program to ensure that it will be able to sustain itself and will be extended into other parts of the company. The concept is already being expanded into different areas of the business so that other business units can take advantage of the overall training strategy.

The inherent strength of the **Strategic Business Development** is in the promotion of best practices as well as the sharing of new ideas and techniques through open discussion and dialogue. This sharing of knowledge provides the inspiration and new ideas to extend the training into new areas. An example might be focusing on specific

elements of the business development process such as the evaluation of wins and losses. Another inspired activity has been the refinement of the company's business development and tracking tool to make it more useful and effective. As the company gains experience with the **Strategic Business Development** program, more such ideas will surface to help refine the program.

Given the experience so far, the future looks very good for continued implementation on a global scale. And what about the culture change that senior management is driving? In the words of the Sales and Marketing Vice President, "... We have to keep pushing for a sales and marketing culture. Slowly but surely we are turning the ship, I can see it. If we can make the full turn it will be great!"

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