

Talent Development 1 – Are You Doing Enough Cross Training?

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Don't you love the advertisements that promise to cure all your problems just by taking a pill? They try to convince you that all ailments are related, and for only \$19.95 plus S&H you can have a full month supply of the cure.



“But wait! If you order within the next 20 minutes, we'll double your order; just pay separate S&H.” It is amazing that there are people who actually believe this drivel.

For organizational ailments, I believe there is a potion that really does attack many issues at the same time, and you can actually get a double dose for a very low price with no S&H (and the offer does not expire in 20

minutes).

The tonic I am referring to is cross training. Let's look at some of the reasons why this practice is such powerful medicine.

Link Between Training and Satisfaction

Several studies over the past 50 years have established a strong link between training and satisfaction. Organizations that continuously train their people have more motivated employees and less absenteeism.

If you study the organizations in the Top 100 companies to work for in the United States, you will see that every one of them has a strong cross training program in place for employees.

Improved Bench Strength

It is not rocket science to discover the benefits of having people cross trained on each other's job. Every time an employee is out for an illness or vacation, it is a simple matter of moving people around to cover the lost function.

Having several back-ups for each position generates the flexibility to operate efficiently in today's frenetic environment. In sports, we know that a team with great bench strength has an easier time winning than one with monolithic superstars.

Better Teamwork

When people train others on their function, a kind of personal bond is struck that is intangible but powerful. It is really a large teambuilding effort to install a cross training program in a company.

People actually enjoy it and rightfully feel the additional skills have something to do with job security.

Interestingly in organizations that do not cross train, many people are protective of their knowledge thinking that being the only one who knows procedures makes them indispensable.

Actually, the reverse is true because when large numbers of people feel that way, there is high tension, and the organization fails when someone is out. Jobs are not very secure in organizations like that.

Reduction in Turn Over

An organization that focuses on cross training suffers less from employee churn. Why? Because people have more variety of work and higher self-esteem.

They have more fun at work and tend to stay with the organization. Also, the opportunities to learn new things adds to the equation.

Basically, people operate at higher levels on Maslow's pyramid in organizations that cross train.

Leads to Higher Trust

Trust is directly related to how people feel about their development. In organizations where people have a solid training program for the future, people know management cares about them as individuals.

The discussions to develop the plan are trust-building events because the topic is how the individual can improve his or her lot in life. That is refreshing and bodes well for the future.

Not Expensive

Of all the medications an organization can take for their problems, cross training is one of the least expensive. Reason: Training can be inserted during the little slack periods within an operating day or week.

Training keeps people occupied in growth activities when there is nothing much else to do. So, the real cost to the organization is much lower than it appears on the surface. When compared to the benefits, the ROI is fantastic.

Keeps the Saw Sharp

We all know the best way to learn something is to teach it to someone else. This is because in order to explain what you are doing you have to understand it very well.

A cross training policy forces incumbent workers to have their job processes well documented and easy to communicate.

Also, in the process of training someone else, there is the opportunity for the trainee to suggest better ways of approaching a task, so the process is being honed and refined all the time. That is healthy because it prevents stagnation.

If your organization does not have an active and specific cross training process, get one started today. It has so many upsides and really no significant downside.

If you have a program, ask yourself if it is fresh and vital. Are you milking this technique well or giving it lip service? If the latter is true, you have a lot to gain by revitalizing your cross training process.

*The preceding information was adapted from the book **Leading with Trust is like Sailing Downwind**, by Robert Whipple. It is available on www.leadergrow.com.*

*Robert Whipple is also the author of **The TRUST Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals, Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online, and Trust in Transition: Navigating Organizational Change**. Bob consults and speaks on these and other leadership topics. He is CEO of Leadergrow Inc. a company dedicated to growing leaders.*