

## **Creating a Management Task Force**

By: Nanette Miner, Ed.D.

One common complaint voiced about training practitioners is that we typically are not “business people.” You can forestall this reputation for yourself by making sure that you understand and can support your company’s business goals – and can speak about them intelligently. You can begin learning more about the business by reading the reports and regular communications that are issued by your company. If your company is publicly traded, be sure to get a copy of its annual report; if your company conducts customer satisfaction surveys, these would be helpful background information for you as well. You can also invite management to be the guiding force behind training decisions - people rarely argue with something they had a hand in creating – and you will demonstrate that you are making business needs the priority of the training department.

To begin, schedule a meeting with no more than five managers who understand the importance of training and for whom training will have the most impact. These managers may not be direct recipients of the training but they might be beneficiaries of, or impacted by, it. For example, the shipping department may not receive the training, but because of training that is given to the order processing department, the workload of the shipping department may change. The manager of the shipping department will most likely want to be involved in the decision making regarding the training for the order processing group. Once you have conducted your one-on-one meetings with managers, you can bring a list of suggested training areas (such as the “in-coming-sales group”) or topics (such as “closing the sale”) to your first management task force meeting. By allowing the task force to weigh and discuss the importance of the various potential training initiatives, you’ll begin to understand more clearly the priorities of your company. You will also have a greater chance of ensuring that the training you create and deliver will be aligned with the goals of the business; it’s safe to assume your task force will choose topics that are important to the success of the business because you will have given a number of individuals, who may have competing goals, an equal voice in the training agenda.

There are two crucial benefits to forming and conducting management task force meetings. Benefit #1 - You never have to agonize over what training should be tackled first. Your task force has become your pseudo-boss, and will make those decisions for you; and benefit #2 - You will not have to struggle with management buy-in or support, since it is management who decided the focus of the training, and empowered you to make it happen.

Here are some tips to effectively utilizing a management task force:

- Hold meetings no more than once per month but no less than once every six weeks.
- Hold breakfast meetings as they seem to be the best attended time of the day; its less likely that your committee members will find their schedules have filled up if you get to them first thing in the morning.
- Schedule the meeting for 45 minutes or less; for some reason getting an hour on someone’s calendar is difficult, but requests for less than one hour are usually granted.

- Have no more than five task force members; however, you can rotate membership on the task force every six or twelve months. In fact, it is recommended that you *do* replace members on a yearly basis, so that different areas of the business can be heard.

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For more information on this topic refer to **The Accidental Trainer: A Reference Manual for the Small, Part-Time, or One-Person Training Department**, Pfeiffer, ISBN 0-7879-8046-3