

Training that Works!

Training is somewhere between a science and an art form and it's taken way too lightly. I am asked from time to time if I offer on-line training and the answer is "No." The reason is that customer service and leadership, which is what I focus on, are primarily about behavior and not necessarily about skill. I'm not saying that you can do these jobs without skill—you certainly have to have skill as well—but if you write down a list of characteristics that make a great customer service employee or a great leader, you are going to find that about 80 percent of those characteristics are behaviors. So 80 percent of the characteristics we all believe make great employees are behaviors and about 20 percent of those are skill.

Yet most internal employee training is skill-based, which on-line training is great for. I think on-line training is a fabulous tool for skill-based training, but I don't think it is as effective for behavior modification. As a matter of fact, I created an exclusive training technique called Perception Awareness Training. I've been working on this for about twelve years. It incorporates all the critical adult learning techniques into one process, and here they are:

First, humor is an absolutely critical component to training. It is very important to use it frequently throughout training. The reason is that humor releases endorphins into the brain that attach themselves to the same receptor cells as morphine. So it's a real feel-good that keeps your brain active and it keeps your Reticular Activating System opened and retaining information.

Your brain is very powerful and can help you learn or it can inhibit you, depending on the messages it is receiving. As an example: If you set your hand on the hot burner of a stove, it sends a signal up to your brain that says, "This is painful." Your brain sends a signal back to your hand that says, "Stop the pain," so you remove your hand. Now, if you're sitting in a class or listening to a seminar and it's boring or someone is talking over your head and confusing you, your brain says, "This is painful," and sends a signal that shuts down your listening (the Reticular Activating System) in an effort to try to stop the pain. So it's really important to make sure training sessions incorporate humor or at least keep them entertaining to keep people active and learning.

Great trainers also need to be passionate about their subject matter. Have you ever gone to a seminar and listened to Zig Ziglar, Tony Robbins, or some of the other great speakers out there and when the seminar was finished you ran to the back of the room and bought as many CDs and DVDs as you could? Ask yourself what was it about that speaker that inspired you or motivated you to do that? You'll hear one common word—passion. They were passionate about what they were speaking on and they got you passionate about it as well with their behavior. So when you are in front of your employees, it is absolutely critical to

make sure they feel that you are passionate about whatever it is you are trying to communicate.

Being a great storyteller is also important. I believe people don't remember statistics but they do remember great stories. I consider myself a great storyteller because ten years after attending my seminars I have had people say that they remember one of the stories I told. As long as the stories are applicable to the subject, it's great to have frequent stories to help make your point.

You also have to have powerful content in order to keep people engaged. You have to have something in there that makes them think, "Wow, I didn't know that!" You can't preach the same stuff over and over again or they will feel dictated to or lectured to. So you truly have to have powerful content that keeps them inspired and motivated. You can gather powerful content by reading books or doing research on-line.

Incorporating the customer's perspective is an innovative idea that I developed about twelve years ago. This is why I call my exclusive training technique "Perception Awareness Training." I think we need to look at ourselves and our behaviors from the customer's perspective. I think if we do that, it's going to tell us more about how we should be doing our job. As an example: If you are a banker and Jack is an employee who does not like shaking people's hands because he is paranoid about germs, he may not offer the customer a handshake. Think about what the customer's perception might be in that case. The perception might be, "He is not shaking my hand so is he uncomfortable with me, or is he uncomfortable with himself? Maybe he lacks confidence. So, do I want to do business with someone who is either uncomfortable with me or uncomfortable with himself? I don't think so."

Another situation might be a teller, cashier, retail clerk, or other front-line employee who does not maintain good eye contact with customers. As a leader and coach, you might sit down with that employee and open some dialogue beginning with a statement such as, "If you went to a car lot to buy a used car and the salesperson was not looking you in the eyes, what might your perception be of that salesperson?"

The employee might reply, "He would seem shifty and might be trying to rip me off."

You might ask the employee, "What else?"

The employee might say, "Maybe he doesn't have any confidence in himself and that's why he is not looking me in the eyes."

"Maybe that is true, and maybe it isn't," you say. Then you might ask the employee, "Is that the reality of that salesperson or is that simply your perception of that salesperson?"

"That is just my perception," the employee will probably reply.

I would then ask the question “Is there any possibility that customers are creating misperceptions about your lack of eye contact as well?”

Some switches should flip on in the employee’s brain and you might hear him or her say, “Wow, I never thought about that.”

Lastly, we need to make sure we accommodate all three learning styles in our training in order to be effective trainers. Those three styles are visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. It is important to incorporate techniques into our training that accommodate all three learning styles. This means we might provide worksheets, use PowerPoint or flip charts, ask questions to keep them active and involved, use good pitch and tone in our voice, and use frequent humor when teaching. If we try to treat everybody the same, we will fail, which is a tremendous disservice to the people we lead.

All the training I do is customized because there’s no such thing as one-size-fits-all. I don’t treat all industries or organizations the same because they are not. Training that is not as methodical as I have described can be a waste of an organization’s resources and employees’ time.