



## **New Work for Corporate Training**

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*How does training evolve from being a resource to a source of competitive advantage? Here are the top 10 strategies.*

Dramatic changes to corporations have ushered in a distinctively new agenda for corporate training. No longer are the big challenges how to provide and administer so many training programs with limited resources, how to negotiate for more training time, how to convince management to invest in emerging technology for training, and how to generate on-the-job support for employee training. For today's new breed of human-systems development leaders, such concerns are dated and now even seem like child's play.

Although these issues persist unresolved in many companies, compare them with the much more demanding task now faced by every organization—how to improve human performance and productivity and generate an organizational competitive advantage. This is the challenging “new work” for corporate training.

These revelations are sending even the more experienced training leaders back to the planning table with their staffs, and often with management, to create a different game plan for corporate training—one that will enable them to accomplish the new work of improving performance and productivity. We routinely facilitate and support these planning efforts for major firms. Based on our experience, here is a list of the top 10 strategies that are emerging from these planning sessions. Together, they represent the best thinking and cutting-edge direction of training leaders who will be first to the future of training:

1. Get clear on training's purpose.
2. Get in economic alignment with management.
3. Work as consultants to management.
4. Form working partnerships with management.
5. Utilize advanced technology.
6. Provide strategic learning resources.
7. Redesign important training programs.
8. Redefine the roles of training practitioners.
9. Restructure the human-performance functions.
10. Lead the improvement in human performance and productivity.

Here are some key issues for each strategy.

### **1. Get Clear on Training's Purpose**

Gone are the bureaucracy-game-playing days when activity justified head count and budgets for all staff functions. Value-added is the new organizational game, and training staffs need to learn how to play and how to win by adding even more value than other resources, whether inside or outsourced. Everyone on staff needs to learn about business, the company, its industry and markets, and its strategy for success. Ultimately, they must come to know what they can do to improve workforce performance and productivity so as to increase the organization's customer satisfaction, market share, profitability, and competitive advantage. This is training's real purpose.

### **2. Get in Economic Alignment with Management**

The corporate crusade for quality, speed, low cost, and flexibility does not exempt training from these standards. Yet training continues to act as though more training time is better, to ignore the satisfaction of its real customer—management—and to seek and spend the maximum it can on training initiatives. Training designers and developers need to learn new ways to train better, faster, and cheaper; and to recognize that every dollar spent only increases the requirement for value-added by the investment. Sharing management's concerns for these measures of operating performance puts the training function in alignment and develops its credibility.

### **3. Work as Consultants to Management**

Training is not intended as an end in itself, but as a means to an end: improved performance. When managers ask for training, they want performance, so if training alone will not provide improved performance (and it probably will not), then advise them on what will. Savvy training practitioners want to offer an effective solution for every performance problem, so they prepare themselves by knowing performance technology, lining up intervention resources in advance, and practicing effective consulting skills.

### **4. Form Working Partnerships with Management**

Many training practitioners do not respect management, often suggesting that management is "the problem." Management can detect this disrespect, and this lack of respect reduces management's trust for training. Characteristically, trainers are masters at relationship-building, so they know how to team up with management. It is now time to model the teamwork skills trainers teach and to partner with management to help the organization.

### **5. Utilize Advanced Technology**

Training practitioners will need to update their education, advance their skills, and expand their knowledge base to produce the sophisticated work their companies will require. As competition begins to depend much more on human performance and productivity, training practitioners will be expected to perform "miracles." Every one of the social sciences, plus all of the business and management disciplines, have developed dramatically during the past 20 years. Advanced knowledge is the most enabling technology of all—training practitioners need to acquire and employ this valuable resource.

### **6. Provide Strategic Learning Resources**

The "corporate university" is a metaphor for the vast learning resources that will be required to support the continuing education, learning, and development of the knowledge and service workers who make up 90 percent of today's workforce. Large organizations will develop many of these resources in house, whereas smaller companies will rely on vendors ranging from state and community colleges to private training vendors. New corporate policies will be required to facilitate a virtual renaissance in the workplace, and corporate training must lead this development.

### **7. Redesign Important Training Programs**

Only by making a much greater positive impact on performance with greater efficiency can training programs deliver on their potential as a superior investment. For most organizations, achieving this goal will require a radical redesign of important training initiatives. Of course, unimportant training programs should be eliminated. Meaningful support of organization

members, surplus resources, and enhanced credibility with management are just a few of the payoffs when training is redesigned for real performance improvement and more-efficient delivery.

### **8. Redefine the Roles of Training Practitioners**

To better address the new work of training, we need many fewer stand-up instructors and training designers and developers and many more group facilitators, performance technologists, and problem-solving consultants. Get the entire department working on needed skills. Set most other work aside for 30 days and concentrate on educating, cross-training, and developing the entire staff. Set an example for other departments undergoing massive change and restructuring.

### **9. Restructure the Human-Performance Functions**

Training cannot continue to operate in a vacuum. It must partner and collaborate with other corporate functions that impact the human-performance systems of the organization, including facilities, compensation, information technology, communications, human-resource development, and organization development. Operating separately, these functions compete for resources and influence. They should be organized to cooperate if the organization is to optimize human performance and productivity.

### **10. Lead the Improvement in Human Performance and Productivity**

Identify areas of the company in which improved human performance or productivity would generate a competitive advantage and develop a plan to do just that. Collaborate with management, telling them your goal and approach. You will be surprised that management knows little about performance technology and high performance. At first, they may doubt that it can be done. Focus on the potential and suggest a pilot project. Once management sees what you can do, it will have some other areas of the business for you to analyze.

The future for training practitioners may never have looked brighter than it does today. However, this rosy outlook may be shared only by those trainers whose departments are undergoing "reinvention" because that's what it will take to meet the new challenge of improving human performance and productivity.

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