

GETTING PEOPLE ON COURSES

In some organisations, training is viewed as low priority and in some an inconvenience. This can lead to low bookings, last minute cancellations and no-shows. Sadly, this becomes a vicious cycle where those that do turn up perceive that the organisation does not value training, so why bother coming on future courses?

- How can training be turned around so that it is seen as a privilege?
- What do successful organisations do?

Diagnose

- If you have high attendance courses and low attendance courses, what is the difference? What makes people attend one and not another?
- If you have a no-show or a cancellation, contact them and their manager to find out why. Ask them what would need to happen to get attendance in the future. Log this information and present it statistically to senior managers and directors. Point out the consequences and costs of future low attendance. (At other times, sell the benefits and success stories of training).

Communicate

- Have a manual of courses and a 'learning site' on the intranet. Make sure this available to all staff and not just managers.
- Make the courses exciting. Give them compelling titles (see the "What's In a Name?" side box). As well as objectives and content, list the benefits of each course (ie. what the individual will gain from being on the course).
- Communicate clearly and charge for cancellations/no-shows (in the same way that an external consultancy will charge you). When someone is booked onto a course, let them and their manager know (preferably months ahead of the course). If you have access to their online diary, book the date out on their schedule. The booking confirmation should also include a cancellation policy. For example: cancelling within a month = 50% charge and within two weeks = 100% charge. Then charge departments who cancel within the time period. Obviously stay flexible in exceptional circumstances.
- Send a reminder perhaps two weeks before the course with date, time, venue and any other relevant info.
- Involve managers but do *not* put them completely in charge of their team's training development. Empower individuals to apply for training themselves perhaps with their manager's sign off. Evaluate managers (eg. at appraisals) as to how well they are facilitating the development of their staff.

Raise the Profile

- Give the Training Department a brand... a logo that goes on all training materials.
- Rather than having a bunch of disparate courses, set up some in-house certificated programmes. People can then either attend individual courses or do a programme to gain a certificate. Avoid running the same course too often... make each one special as opposed to run of the mill.
- Some organisations link promotional prospects with training programmes. For example: to be considered for the role of a manager, an individual needs to have completed the 'First Steps to Management' programme.
- Make the programmes challenging but not off-putting. For example: to get on the programme, the individual needs to attend an interview (and for senior programmes perhaps pass an assessment centre). As well as a set of courses, the individual could do some case work, demonstrating competencies by their actions at work.
- And of course make sure that you are delivering high quality and enjoyable training.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Course titles can affect people's interest and desire to book a place onto it. For the title to have the greatest impact, it needs to be appropriate to the culture of the organisation. Should it be traditional and practical or dynamic and exciting?

To get senior management on training courses you could try inviting them to come on a pilot course that requires their organisational experience to give feedback on the course content so that it is right for rest of the staff. Alternatively, place the word "advanced", "strategic" or "executive" in the title (eg. "Advanced negotiation", "Strategic influencing", or "Executive time management").

In some instances, to get an original title, look at the benefits of the course and use a benefit as the title (eg. from "time management" to "getting more done"). Look at book titles on the subject. They may give you interesting ideas. Here are some examples:

Time Management

Organising yourself, getting/get organised, getting/get focussed, getting more done, time focus

Stress Management

Handling Pressure, Dealing with Pressure, Understanding Stress, Working with Change, Calm in a Crisis

Communication Skills

Communicating with Confidence, Delivering the Message, Getting your Point Across

Assertiveness

Personal Power

Influence Skills

Persuasion, Getting your Own Way, Power of Influence, Getting What You Want

Negotiation Skills

Results and Relationships, Doing the Deal, Win/Win