

SMARTCEO'S WHITE PAPER

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Learning and Performance During Challenging Times

Strategic business leaders are well aware of how important learning and performance is to the bottom line of their organizations. Ensuring that employees have the knowledge, skills and ability to perform at a high level to be successful is a critical business strategy. How can you, as a CEO, ensure that you keep this high level of learning and performance during difficult economic times? What should your strategy be?

You need to decide that employee learning and performance will help drive your organization's continued success. You will need to ensure that this belief is part of your business strategy. How best to deliver new knowledge can be diverse. We suggest to clients that they take a comprehensive approach to learning and measuring performance. Let's review several ideas for both.

Organizations need to be able to assess what knowledge, skills and abilities are needed to be successful at all levels of the organization. What do your frontline staff, supervisors and leaders need to know; and how should they behave in the workplace? How can you measure how successful the learning and training has been in your organization? Are you getting a solid return on your investment?

Many of our clients have all employees develop individual, team, manager and leadership performance plans. Employees have a set of skills and expectations on their performance plan that is reviewed with them on a regular basis. How do you guarantee that those plans and the associated training will happen? What do you do with employees who don't meet expectations?

Learning can be delivered in many ways today. When an employee wants to learn within the traditional classroom experience, employers can either have their employees go to an educational institution or employers bring in an independent training company to teach their employees. When we deliver training at a client location, our clients enjoy the fact that their employees will all be learning the new skill the same way and there is some natural networking and teambuilding during the program. They also like the objectiveness of an outside trainer. We feel that we bring a business-like approach to our training programs by teaching employees real workplace situations.

Learning for a large group of employees can also be delivered online. This can be used to ensure that all employees receive the same information in a short period of time. It is used often in compliance training to ensure that all employees know something that is legally required for them to know. Our firm now offers over 100 courses online for clients to deliver learning in this fashion.

Sometimes learning is best delivered to the individual based on their specific needs, needs that might be different from others in the organization. Some of this training is certification training for someone's specific job. Sometimes, learning is designed for the individual and delivered confidentially with the use of a learning (or executive) coach. Coaching is an expanding and growing business, as employers find that this type of learning is best for some employees. Our firm has expanded its coaching team, from sales specialists to senior executives; we have a coach that can meet you employee's individual needs. The benefit of an individual

coaching program is that it's all about the individual participant's needs for growth and skill development. Many executives would probably not seek out professional development at this point in their careers if not for executive coaching.

You now have a learning plan in place; one that is tied to the assessed needs of your business and employees. You're going to ensure that all employees have an opportunity to learn and grow. How do you measure that learning to determine if it was a wise investment for your firm?

Many of our clients have a performance management process that is done annually, and it is usually tied to a compensation increase. Most supervisors, in that position with compensation looming in their discussions, will sometimes smooth over any poor performance to ensure that their employees get a good salary increase. Though, having this performance conversation is always a good idea, having it once a year is very incomplete. How often should that conversation happen, both formally and informally?

We suggest that just-in-time informal feedback to employees is always a good idea. This is especially important with younger employees who need immediate feedback, almost constantly. It is also a good idea that formal performance management happens, at a minimum, quarterly (some organizations do it monthly). This ensures that employees are moving towards their goals and that any learning is applied to the job hopefully through behavior change.

So, what about you, the CEO of the organization? You have ensured that employees at all levels of the organization have the opportunities to learn and grow through training, development and managing performance. What about your growth and performance? Smart CEOs will take the time and effort to invest in learning and development in themselves. How can CEOs get feedback from others to measure how they are performing?

We do help CEOs figure it out; and with assessment tools and executive coaching, we can help a CEO learn and grow. Taking your own performance to the next level should also be part of your business planning and strategy.

So, what next? It's time to sit down with your team; and as you discuss your business strategies, discuss how learning and performance will continue to happen in your organization. It doesn't take a great amount of resources, but it does take a big commitment from leaders in your organization. However, it will pay off in rewards such as increased performance in your employees, your teams and your results! Visit our site for more information about how our firm can help make this happen for your organization. www.trainingsolutions.com