

CLASSROOM LEARNING TECHNIQUES FOR ON-THE-JOB TRAINERS

Authored by Lillie Ann Piosalan
Personnel Journal/February 1989

At a recently conducted seminar, "Training for Productivity: Teller Trainers' Training," for the American Institute of Banking in Honolulu, Hawaii, it was revealed that on-the-job trainers virtually have been ignored in the area of training. Half of the seminar participants were classroom trainers and the other half on-the-job trainers. "On-the-job trainers" is a generic term that includes front-line supervisors, senior employees who oriented new workers, and those with trainer titles.

Each group discovered the dynamics of a different type of training session. The classroom trainers realized their work was important because technical knowledge had to be implanted firmly in new employees' minds. This training is the simulation of the real world minus the distractions of customer contact and ringing telephones. The on-the-job trainers appreciated the amount of planning that goes into the classroom trainers' job and the amount of materials that have to be prepared.

Classroom trainers usually possess the educational background necessary to plan the curriculum and the presentation skills necessary to execute lesson plans. They literally thrive in a utopian environment, having the learning environment under almost complete control. In most cases, the classroom trainer has prepared extensively for the session and, on occasion, only slight annoyances pop up (such as the audiovisual equipment won't work properly).

How does the on-the-job trainer control his or her environment? Not only is a plan needed but also impromptu training with its flexibility in dealing with the environment (e.g., customer service). Customers are not always courteous; strange or unusual circumstances may arise; and interruptions are encountered.

On-the-job trainers may not have the educational background for creating curriculum and understanding how adults learn. These employees, however, are experienced and knowledgeable in the technical job skills required to carry out the day-to-day operations.

Mr. TOP Can Simplify Training

Mr. TOP. A basic formula has been devised for on-the-job trainers called "Mr. TOP." The acronym stands for aspects of a training plan. Any on-the-job trainer can plan a program simply by remembering Mr. TOP.

M - Materials needed

R - Resources

T - Time frame

O - Objectives

P – Procedure

The *materials* needed for the program should be assembled in advance. Obvious objects easily can be overlooked, and the on-the-job training trainer needs to have them at his or her disposal. For instance, stapler, pens, note pads and other tools or implements cannot be forgotten if the trainee is to function in the day-to-day operation.

The *resources* available to the on-the-job trainers are priceless. Resources include the humans (i.e., key people in the company from whom to get information in expedient manner) and materials (i.e., textbooks, handbooks, manuals and so forth).

The *time frame* for the total program and the daily plan has to be established clearly. Then training can be paced accordingly (e.g., how many hours should be devoted to a particular skill?).

Objectives have to be stated precisely to the trainees, and the on-the-job trainer has to be cognizant of what should be taught in the program. This aspect of the plan is crucial. For example, the on-the-job trainer should be able to state exactly what a new employee should be learning on any given day. The objectives should be stated in observable and measurable terms. For example:

- Immeasurable: The trainee will understand how to use the company telephone. (How can a trainee's understanding be measured?)
- Measurable: The trainee will be able to transfer calls and put a caller on hold. (A trainee can be observed executing the tasks.)

Procedures for repetitive tasks should be documented in a manual. This aspect of the training plan is time-consuming. If a procedure is documented, however, it makes training easier and more standardized for subsequent use. Trainees also can use the manual for reference.

It is possible to use the Mr. TOP formula to train new employees. Another important aspect of on-the-job trainers responsibilities is familiarizing the trainee with the work site. Sometimes first impressions are generalized based on the trainer's ability to communicate effectively. On-the-job trainers, however, usually have the natural ability to make trainees feel comfortable in the new work environment.

In all organizations, large or small, the classroom trainer should work in close coordination with the on-the-job trainers. Together, these types of training will make the organization a fine-tuned team. Without agreement and coordination of materials,

resources, time frame, objectives and procedures, a trainee easily could get confused as to what the organization is about.