

Anchor Your Customer Training In Your Organizational Culture¹

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From small single-owner firms to large service organizations in both the public and private sectors, customers are more informed, more sophisticated and more demanding than ever before. Satisfying customers has become a central, driving force in today's service-oriented business world. The companies that succeed today are customer-driven companies. Corporations rise or fall according to how well they pay attention to the needs of their customers.

To succeed in this challenging climate, every employee, from top management to front-line service and sales personnel, must see what they do through a customer-driven mindset. They must keep the customer foremost in their thinking and decision-making. The old pyramid organization with top management at the top and the customer base at the bottom has been turned upside down. Today, top management and every employee must work to support the customer base at the top.



This need to focus on customers has spawned the vigorous growth of a variety of what I believe are Band-Aid training programs—special workshops and seminars, accompanied by books, tapes, videos. Companies have turned to these products in the hopes of transforming themselves into customer-driven organizations.

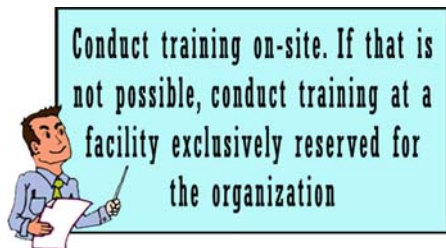
Unfortunately, top managers are repeatedly disappointed with the results obtained by investing time and money in such resources. Many of the large number of training efforts funded by organizations every year fail for the following reasons:

1. Most of them are delivered offsite, with no connection to the reality of each participant's organizational culture.
2. Many employees attend training programs because they are told to do so, not because they are internally motivated to help the organization become more successful.
3. Most are "canned" programs repeated from session to session with very little tailoring to the specific needs, issues, and problems associated with the individual organizations of attendees.
4. Training usually focuses on individuals, rather than on operating units.
5. Training programs are designed to create awareness and understanding, but often do not provide the tools needed to translate what is learned into daily habits.



¹ From: http://www.arniedahlke.com/120610_Anchor_Training_in_Your_Organizational_Culture.pdf.
Take a moment to explore my previous Timely Tips at: <http://www.arniedahlke.com/timelytips.htm>

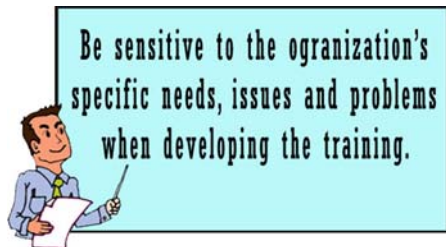
These five reasons for failure cut across organizations of all types, large or small, public or private. In order for any training to succeed, organizations must take actions to counter each of them:



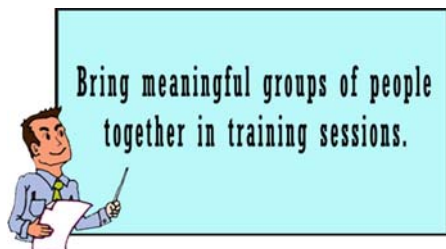
Anchor the training to the organization. Tie it to the Vision of the founders and the Mission of the organization. Make it clear that the training was designed to fit the organizational culture—the “personality” of the organization—the assumptions, values, and norms of organization members and their behaviors.



Show employees the importance of each of their jobs and how they all are interconnected in delivering exceptional products and/or services to customers. This will motivate them to attend training with a more committed sense of ownership, which will stimulate them to adapt a more customer-driven mindset when applying what they learn in the workshop.



Avoid generic training by grounding training sessions in examples and applications that are meaningful to the organization. Be guided by the specific organizational needs, issues, and problems when selecting training content and choosing delivery techniques.



Train people together who work together or who's jobs are interrelated. Focusing on individuals rather interrelated groups may help improve needed skills and attitudes, but ultimately this approach ignores the reality and potential power of the team culture that guides customer-driven work.



Actualize training by translating what is learned through involving employees in action plans with measurable objectives that will be used to assess the effectiveness of training. Ensure that the plans are attuned to the strategies, challenges and unique problems of the organization, particularly with reference to customer service.

Measurement is fundamentally important to this training strategy. Furthermore, when such measurement is undertaken at the beginning of training, not only will it help focus training on more relevant training needs, but it will also provide a data base that can be used later to evaluate training effectiveness and future training needs.

Any training, most particularly Customer Relations training, has a better chance of succeeding if it is "grounded" in a solid cultural database that describes: where the organization is going; who and how it wants to serve; attributes of the organizational culture that will facilitate or inhibit training effectiveness; and specific concerns of participating employees that need to be addressed during their learning experiences.