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DOES HR MEASURE UP?

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on how to prove the
function's value

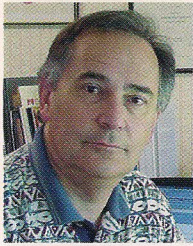
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TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

By Cy Charney

Who is responsible for training success?

Peer mentoring is a new low-cost strategy that places responsibility with the learner

Which trainer isn't frustrated with the emphasis placed on getting great evaluations after each session? What if the evaluations were less than wonderful, but the participants learned, applied the skills and even improved their performance? Wouldn't that be more important? You would think so. In any case, traditional "chalk and talk" classroom training provides limited payback. According to the research of William Glasser, a noted Chicago-based educator, we retain:

- 10 per cent of what we read;
- 20 per cent of what we hear;
- 30 per cent of what we see;
- 50 per cent of what we both see and hear;
- 70 per cent of what we discuss;
- 80 per cent of what we experience; and
- 95 per cent of what we teach others.

Few training programs take advantage of the most effective method of learning: training someone else. This strategy is based on the old maxim that if you give people a fish you will feed them for a day. But, if you teach them to fish, they can feed themselves for a lifetime. In other words, teach people how to teach so that they can teach each other.

An alternative approach

Organizations such as the City of Toronto, Peel Region and Vancouver City Police are teaching people to fish (learn) so that staff can benefit from peer mentoring. They have started programs that encourage team learning without a recognized facilitator. The volunteer learners take responsibility for their own learning by:

- Choosing the skills they need to learn;
- Dividing the topics among the members;
- Individually researching the topic;
- Taking turns to facilitate learning at regularly-scheduled meetings; and
- Holding each other accountable for applying the knowledge and skills between meetings.

The teams are made up of six to 12 members – all volunteers. After an initial train-the-trainer type of session, the teams schedule their own monthly meetings. Each session takes place at a time that is least disruptive to operations and lasts between one and two hours.

Evaluating success

What makes this process effective? Ownership. The teams are responsible in every way. *They* volunteer for the learning, pick their own topics, teach each other and hold themselves accountable for applying their learning. An increasing number of organizations are using the system and reporting measurable benefits. Sue Shatzky, project lead of the program at the City of Toronto, indicates "...that each session costs about \$20 per participant, based on what we pay for materials. For a typical group of 10, that would be \$200 for a half day." She adds, "An external facilitator with an appropriate competency level would probably charge about \$1,000 for that time."

Tina Cooper, director of operations for the Hamilton Health Sciences Volunteer Association, quantifies the benefits in another way – reduced cost of

replacing valuable staff. Her turnover in the learning team has been 15 per cent over the two years of its existence as compared to 40 per cent for the hospital overall and 70 per cent for the retail industry generally. Other organizations report:

- Greater commitment to corporate goals;
- Increased accountability for solving problems; and

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- Development of leadership skills.

There is back-up support for the concept anecdotally. Gloria-Anne Walchetseder, a team member from the City of Toronto, reports that the program "has not only given me a great sense of accomplishment but has also allowed me to showcase and discover skills that I would never have thought I had before."

Another team member, Beth Camposano, says, "Our experience with peer mentoring has been very rewarding. It offered us the excellent opportunity to be the trainer and the learner. The process of learning valuable skills from each other gave us the

confidence to meet the challenges in the workplace."

Look before you leap

Will all staff take to this innovative approach? No. Experience has shown that the type of people who benefit most from the process are those who:

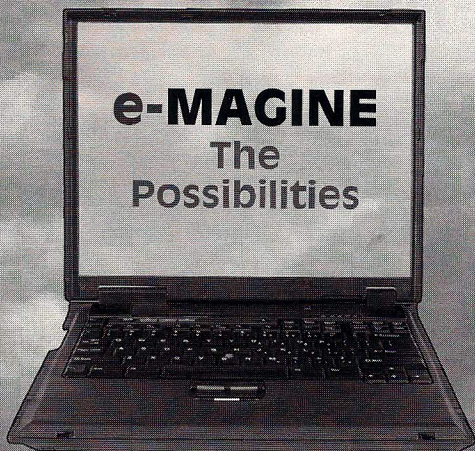
1. Are self-directed;
2. Enjoy working in a team; and
3. Love to learn.

And the process works best if members volunteer, too.

It is too easy to say, "Our people are our most important asset" or that "The gold is not in the ground, it is in the people." These clichés have little

meaning without a significant change in the way we develop our people. Peer learning is not only an economical way of doing it; it is also a smart way. □

Cy Charney, president of Charney and Associates Inc., is a leading Canadian consultant in performance improvement. He is the author of six books, including the best-selling The Instant Manager, The Portable Mentor, and his latest best-seller, The Salesperson's Handbook, all of which are tools used in his peer mentoring learning system. Charney can be reached at (905) 886-5605 or www.askcharney.com.



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