If Training's the Answer, What's the Question?

Carl tells you that his team is not getting along well. Jan complains about an employee whose performance review was poor. Sam has money left in the training budget for this year. They all want training. How can you tell if training is really the solution?

Ensure that training solutions address the issues

A needs assessment helps you determine the real issues in a given situation. An understanding of the issues helps you determine whether training is part of the solution. If training is not part of the solution, you will want to seriously reconsider your plans. Training initiatives that do not address real issues erode the training department's reputation and affect employee buy-in to future initiatives.

> *"No matter what your budget, it's important to be certain that your training solution will work."*

Assessments can be as formal or as informal as you have the time and resources to dedicate. They may range from a simple discussion with the manager to a comprehensive analysis including employee surveys and performance evaluation. No matter what your budget, it's important to be certain that your training solution will work.

Questions for identifying performance issues

Here are some questions you can ask to gain a better understanding of performance issues. To get a complete picture, ask these questions to a variety of people at various levels of the organization.

1. What's happening or not happening that concerns you?
2. Why do you think it's happening or not happening?
3. Do the people involved know what they're supposed to do? How do you know?
4. What training has the employee already received?
5. What could be keeping the employee from performing the way you wish?
6. What's changed that might impact what's happening?
7. What are the top three obstacles employees face on the job?
8. How will you know when performance has improved?

As a general guideline, training initiatives work well to address performance issues where people lack skills, knowledge or understanding. Training does not effectively address situations that involve obstacles outside of the employee's control, discipline problems or a lack of consequences for improved performance.

So, the next time someone asks you for training, respond by asking questions that lead to a mutual understanding of the best solution. If it turns out not to be a training solution, you'll be glad you saved everyone wasted time and effort on an ineffective training initiative.

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