

Don't Send Them To Training!

Senior managers regularly ask HR to find a training course to which they can send a problem employee.

Short answer: Don't do it.

Longer answer:

Performance problems exist in the workplace, not in that lovely program with the thick binder, colorful slides, and effusive trainer. Very rarely will training, per se, solve a performance problem.

Please don't get me wrong. Training can be very powerful when properly applied. "Properly applied" means that the senior manager is deeply involved, and doesn't think s/he can get off the hook by simply authorizing training. S/he has serious work to do before and after the training.

The senior manager who wants to pack his/her problem child off to charm school should *first*:

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- Have specific and substantive discussion(s) with the employee as to the problematic behaviors (what happened, with what result, and what should happen differently in the future).
- Review the course content with the employee and mutually identify key areas for attention by the employee.
- Identify when the newly-trained employee will
 - o report back about key lessons,
 - o walk his/her manager through the material relevant to those lessons, and
 - o identify where, when and how those lessons will be applied by the trainee – with behavioral specificity.

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Shortly after the trainee returns, the senior manager should *then*:

- Follow through on the discussion referred to above
- Spend the next several weeks or months looking diligently for opportunities to acknowledge and praise positive movement toward the behavioral goals set.
- Revisit the goals and the specific training materials applied.
 - o If progress is slight, this should be a few bare weeks and done with serious attention, revisiting the goals set in the beginning.
 - o If progress is great, it can be in a few months, with the goal of affirming and celebrating the lessons learned

For some employees, one way to both leverage training dollars and consolidate lessons learned is to have the trainee take a portion of the materials and present them to his/her colleagues. This is not possible with all employees, but powerful when it works. And it will work best if it is set out as an expectation in the discussion between the employee and the senior manager *before* the training.

The potential power of training is often squandered when the senior manager is not continuously involved. And its power is multiplied when it that involvement is early, focused and substantial.