

Creating a culture of learning within your organization

To remain competitive in a constantly changing global marketplace, organizations need employees who are adaptable, engaged, productive, and ready to meet emerging business challenges. It has also become increasingly important to attract new, highly-skilled talent, while retaining employees with long-term industry experience and knowledge. As a manager, one of the most effective ways you can do this is by establishing a culture of learning – a workplace in which continuous learning is encouraged at all levels of your organization.

Benefits of a learning culture

At a time when organizational learning is most needed, many companies are reducing their learning and development (L&D) budgets in an attempt to reduce operational costs. However, the return on investment of a strategic L&D program far exceeds its costs. A well-planned and executed program will result in:

- Superior employee performance
- More innovation and creativity
- Greater productivity
- Employees who are adaptive to change
- A more engaged, motivated and loyal workforce
- Well-developed leaders at every level of the organization
- Employees equipped with up-to-date technical skills
- An organization that attracts and retains the best and brightest employees
- Enhanced succession planning through the creation of qualified successors within the organization

What is a culture of learning?

A culture of learning goes far beyond “training days”, lunch ‘n’ learns and the occasional seminar or workshop. Rather, it permeates every aspect of a business. It focuses not only on improving products, but enhancing and developing your organization’s most important asset – your people. In addition, a learning culture:

- **Looks for embedded knowledge and encourages knowledge transfer.** Mentoring programs cost nothing and mean a great deal. Mentors feel their experience is valued and respected while the mentored individual feels the organization wants them to succeed. For organizations, successful mentoring means retaining a wealth of industry knowledge and expertise.
- **Tailors learning to the individual.** What skills would your employees like to acquire? As their manager, what do you see as important? Encouraging your people to set career goals and pursue necessary training to reach those goals sends a clear message that you and your organization are invested in their future.
- **Fosters creativity,** innovative thinking and finding new ways to do business.
- **Allows your employees to apply their newly learned skills.** Your people must feel comfortable about making occasional mistakes and having your support, as their manager, when practicing new ways of working.
- **Understands the workforce** and provides learning and development in a variety of ways to encompass generational and cultural learning preferences.

Ingredients to create a culture of learning

Creating an organizational culture of continuous learning and development includes the following components:

- **Commitment of the executive leadership team.** A learning culture cannot be established or maintained without the commitment and involvement of senior management. It begins at the top and cascades down through the organization's business objectives and values.
- **Personalized learning.** Different age groups, cultures and personalities mean that a "one size fits all" approach to delivering training is not effective. L&D needs to be delivered through a variety of methods (e-learning, workshops, mentoring, coaching, college courses, etc.) and content, objectives and outcomes must be appropriate and timely for each employee. This can be achieved through performance appraisals or regular L&D meetings between you and your employees.
- **Aligning learning to business needs.** Employees at every level of the organization should be consulted regularly about the problems they are facing, so they can apply their knowledge and experience when offering practical, relevant solutions. As business needs constantly shift, L&D must remain timely and relevant.
- **Remove barriers to learning.** One example of this might be to allow your employees time off for relevant training. If job duties make that difficult, try to provide online learning where your employees can complete assignments from any location and at any time. However, keep in mind that self-directed, online learning must be easy to use and easily accessible.
- **Setting clear, measurable objectives.** These are set after a thorough inquiry with the HR team, senior management, you and your employees.
- **Listen to feedback.** Many companies find confidential online assessments and employee surveys a good way to determine employees' views and how to improve and expand their L&D program.
- **Encourage experimentation.** Your employees must be encouraged to experiment with new ideas, use newly learned skills and take calculated risks. As a manager, it is important to recognize and reward those employees on your team who offer innovative and creative solutions.

Your role as a People Leader

Investing in your employees' L&D and listening to how their new knowledge can support the organization will help establish yourself as a manager who values the insights and opinions of your highly skilled team. More importantly, implementation of your employees' suggestions can improve service, increase productivity and positively impact the bottom line. If your team feels you are investing in their development and their ideas make a difference, they will not only feel valued, but will also be loyal to you and to your organization.

Looking for additional support? Your Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) can help. You can receive support through a variety of resources. Call your EFAP at 1 800 387-4765 or visit workhealthlife.com.