

## **Communicating the Value of Training**

By Nanette Miner, Ed.D.

In many respects you can liken a training experience to a customer service experience. How? Well, studies have shown that poor customer service experiences are much more memorable than good ones. A good customer service experience is deemed “normal” or expected. We often regale our friends with horror stories, but rarely say “I’ve got to tell you about the nicest CSR I talked to at the cable company yesterday!” Likewise, in order for your training department to receive positive PR, it behooves you to communicate the value of training; you can’t rely on satisfied attendees to do it for you since, as just noted, a good experience may be unremarkable.

There are three primary means of communicating with the managers and workers within the organization: written, spoken, and personal. With practice, each type of communication will come naturally, but in the beginning you’ll need to give some forethought to what you are communicating and to whom.

### **Written Communications**

Memos should be issued once a month to all senior management and management positions. The subject line for the communication might be “training memo,” or “training update.” Keep the communication short – no more than three or four paragraphs – and upbeat. Include what the training department is currently working on which will rollout in the future and what the training department has accomplished during the month. While you don’t want the memo to overwhelm recipients with numbers or statistics (don’t tell them how many people were trained or how many hours of training took place) you do want to include positive numbers that are attributable to training such as increased customer satisfaction scores, reduced cycle time or the number of accident-free days. The close of the training memo should always invite individuals to contact you if they have any questions or would like further information. This will allow you and your department to regularly present itself in a consistently positive light and will reinforce that the training department is approachable and happy to assist anyone within the organization. A training update might also be included in a company newsletter or posted on a common bulletin board. If you are able to issue the memo in a hard-copy, print format, be sure to include photos of recent training events. Photos always capture people’s attention and cause them to read the caption which explains the photo.

### **Spoken Communications**

Every day you will need to actually “talk” about the training function. Sometimes you will have scheduled formal presentations, but most often you will find yourself in impromptu situations in which you will need to answer questions, communicate the value of training, or defend a decision you have made.

People are more likely to listen if they believe you are speaking about them or speaking their “language.” One way to determine what “language” someone speaks is to be aware of their function in the organization. For instance, return on investment means something to a finance manager but probably means very little to the customer service manager. The customer service manager would be more influenced by a communication which focused on increased customer satisfaction or reduced number of calls being escalated to supervisors. Another way to determine “language” is to listen when individuals describe problems or concerns associated with their business unit. For instance, you would naturally assume a quality control manager would be concerned with QC issues – but you may not know the prosecution manager is also worried about QC unless you had a conversation with him about what was going on in his department. A third – and so obvious it is almost always overlooked – way to learn what others care about is to ask

them. The next time you run in to someone, try: “The last time we spoke, you were concerned (or excited) about \_\_\_\_; how’s that going?” By paraphrasing a person’s concerns, and using their language when you speak with them, you will earn a reputation within your organization as someone who “gets its.”

Another way to enhance your spoken communication is through the use of stories. For example, in addition to saying, “As a result of the customer service training, the call center queue time has been reduced from an average of three minutes to an average of 70 seconds,” be sure to also say, “and Roger Jones was personally singled out by the IT manager of our client company, MediaZach, for his personable and professional handling of a service issue.” This type of illustration communicates the message: The customers notice (and benefit from) our investment in training.

### **Personal Communications**

Finally, make it a habit to always include a “formal” pronouncement about training during any information conversations you have with people of influence. For example, when parting company with a business unit manager, you might say, “I’m glad I ran in to you. I’m on my way to poke my head in to the quality assurance training happening in training room C. The early buzz we’re hearing about this class is that participants are eager to apply it back on the job.” This type of value communication subtly reminds the other party of what the training department is doing on behalf of the organization. In all communications, keep your message(s) short and positive and, if at all possible, tailored to the interests of the other party. It’s up to the training department to promote itself in a positive light to the whole organization.

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Dr. Miner is the founder of the non-profit support group The Accidental Trainer; created to help all trainers who have found themselves “thrust” into the role. This article is based on ideas from her book by the same name, *The Accidental Trainer*, (c) John Wiley & Sons, Inc., (2006).