

# WHY YOUR TRAINING DEPARTMENT NEEDS TO BE AT THE TABLE DURING STRATEGIC PLANNING



Many companies do not consider training when they are making long-range strategic plans. Some do include training in their planning, but don't inform their training departments until afterwards.

What a mistake. Training is critical when launching new initiatives. That is another way of saying it is essential for growth and progress. When training has become an afterthought, companies operate in a reactive, not proactive way.

Here are two examples . . .

**1 When a company was expanding into a new part of the country,** company leaders made all kinds of plans about facilities, marketing and technology. Then as an afterthought,

they realized the need to train new employees in the new territory. The training department had to scramble to create training programs in only a few weeks. Why? If the training department had been involved in planning, there would have been no need to rush, and no emergency.

**2 When another company was introducing a new product,** leaders only realized late in the game that the company would have to train employees how to sell it, service it,



Evan Hackel

and provide customer support. So they called the training department at the eleventh hour to develop training to meet a "sudden need" that was actually not sudden at all.

With planning, those high-pressure demands for training could have been handled calmly, well ahead of time. Even more important, the programs that the training departments developed would probably have been better too.

If your training department has been forced into situations like those, don't wait around for someone from upper management to invite you to get involved in higher level planning, and don't wait to start creating a strategic plan of your own. Claim your rightful seat at the planning table and get involved.

## The Training Department Needs its Own Strategic Plan Too

In many companies, the training department has become like the shoemaker in an old fable about the cobbler who has no shoes. If you don't know the story, he was so busy making shoes for everyone else that he never made any for himself. So he walked around barefoot.

"Is your training department helping your company reach its most important missions and goals, or just plunking away at problems that people bring to your door? How can you turn that problem around?"

The training departments in many companies function in a similar way. They are so busy planning for other departments that they never do any planning for themselves. They keep reacting to demands instead of taking control.

And that is shortsighted. To succeed at the highest level, a training department needs to consider questions like these . . .

- **What big company initiatives do you need to support?**

In other words, the big picture. Is your training department helping your company reach its most important missions and goals, or just plunking away at problems that people bring to your door? How can you turn that problem around?

- **Can you create a master plan for the coming year's projects that builds in enough time for critical steps?**

Remember, cutting corners is the enemy of high quality.

- **Do you know what your top training priority will be in one month, three months, and over the next year?**

Can you create a master plan for the coming year's projects that builds in enough time for critical steps?

- **Are you allowing enough time to improve the way you develop new training?**

When you are developing new programs, are you so rushed that you're cutting important steps, like interviewing customers when revising customer service training?

- **Are you training your trainers in key skills and technologies?**

Do the people in your department

need to learn new skills? What kind of training do they need, and when and how are you going to provide it?

- **Are you overlooking divisions or departments in your company?**

Maybe you have been too busy serving the "squeaky wheels."

- **Are you adapting your plans to meet competitive threats?**

Are there specific challenges to your company, such as the arrival of a strong competing company in your market, that training could help your company overcome? Isn't it time to move that to the top of your list of priorities?

## Consider Setting a Big Hairy Audacious Goal

A big hairy audacious goal reflects what you want your training department to become. It is the biggest idea possible. It could take years to reach, but that is okay.

Your big hairy audacious goal should be immense, exciting, and motivational. It is like a flag that you put in the ground far ahead of you – something that everyone can see and try to reach.

You can take your first steps toward getting there today. How? Talk to management, get a seat at the table, and create your own strategic plan.

Evan Hackel is a 35-year franchising veteran as both a franchisor and franchisee. He is CEO of Tortal Training, a leading training development company in Charlotte, North Carolina, and Principal and Founder of Ingage Consulting in Woburn, Massachusetts. Evan is the host of Training Unleashed and author of *Ingaging Leadership*. Evan speaks on Seeking Excellence, Better Together, Ingaging Leadership and Attitude is Everything.

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