

MONKEY SEE

MONKEY DO

We're hearing a heck of a lot these days about staff training. Yours may be a company that already spends plenty on it. On the other hand, you may be feeling a bit threatened and at a loss - "What do I know about training? What's it going to cost? I'm not a teacher; my staff learn on the job."

Bingo.

What a great many managers don't realise is that ninety per cent of staff training takes place on the shop floor. Ninety percent! By anyone's standards, that's a lot of training.

Let's take this a bit further. There are two sides to shop-floor training. First, we'll look at the obvious. You can use the more formal, or 'classroom' approach:

Suppose you are telling a new member of staff - we'll call him David - how to make a client feel confident that you are doing everything in your power to sell his property. You spend ten minutes running through the agency procedures: the importance of building rapport with the client; contact by phone; contact through visits; written reports or updates; sympathising with the client's concerns.

"Right with that?" you ask, gathering up your file. "Check back with me if you have any worries."

Well, it sounds all right. That's how most staff are trained, aren't they? On-the-job experience?

They are indeed. But perhaps not quite in the way you expect. There's an old saying:

"Monkey see, monkey do."

When it comes to training, what most of us in business don't understand is the importance of modelling. Show, don't tell.

Which brings us to the flip side of shop-floor training: the informal demonstration of the right way to do business. We just go about our business and the rest of the staff absorb our behaviour. Feeling a twinge of doubt here? If so, it might be that you're one jump ahead of me. Yes, the problem here is the modelling of bad behaviour - impatience with the customers, curt phone manners, time-wasting, procrastination, the whole bit.



There's not much point in spending time or money on formal staff training if you (or senior personnel) are demonstrating bad work habits. And there's a problem with formal staff training - it needs ongoing maintenance to be effective. You must be careful that the objective of each workshop fits the need. And you have to find time for formal sessions when they won't interfere with business.

Let's look again at our session on client rapport with our new staff member, David. Was it a rushed ten minutes that telegraphed 'I want you to spend time reassuring the client, but my time's too valuable to spend reassuring you?' Did you bother to establish real rapport with David? Is it

possible that he may even see you postponing contact with difficult clients yourself, although that's not what you told him to do?

Monkey see, monkey do.

Management all over the world is beginning to realise the importance of effective staff training. And particularly the wealth of training opportunities on the shop floor.

Dr. Henry Morrow, a noted American psychologist, feels that we need to do a minimum of 32 hours a year in the classroom or become humanly obsolete in our own industry. "After holidays and sick days," he says, "staff commonly spend about 239 days per year on the shop floor. And that means 239 opportunities for formal or informal staff training!"

The IBM experience is another eye-opener. IBM consider staff training to be so vital, they have spent nine hundred million dollars on training programs. Why so much?

They nominate five major reasons: growth; change; customer productivity; employee productivity; and human resource management.

IBM management believes that by the year 2000, three out of every four people in industry will need to be retrained. They see the biggest problem as being "not the arms race, not oil shortages but human obsolescence." For success, they claim, "our people have to know more and be able to do more than the competitor, and we educate people accordingly."

The management challenge of the nineties is to deliver quality staff training. For success in business today, managers must have not only good communication skills and good planning skills, but - good training skills.

We should all remember that the purpose of training is to keep the compass pointing north - and the manager's role is to identify weakness.

Remember, too, that training doesn't have to be a stand-up, knock-em-over-the-head-with-a-hammer thing. A structured thirty minutes should do the following:

- Identify the problem.
- Show the solution (with input from staff).
- Process a system that allows you to observe that the new skill has been learned.

As for the informal training opportunities - which are present all the time - look at yourself and your business operations under a microscope.

Then put a sign up on your wall:

Monkey see, monkey do.

Would you want your monkeys copying you?



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