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7 Lessons Direct Sellers Can Learn from Corporate Training

by Vince Han

**Originally published in
World of Direct Selling, January 2019**

The success of any direct selling organization is determined by how knowledgeable, skilled and motivated their field distributors are. Thus training has always been a major pillar of a direct seller's sales and marketing strategy.

Similarly, large corporations (or any size corporation for that matter) are only successful as far as their people are able to carry them. All major corporations have a team dedicated to training and developing their people. These teams are often called L&D (Learning and Development) or Talent Management teams.

Of course, direct sellers differ because their sales organizations are not employees that report to an office and a manager,subject to promotions or firings based an annual performance review. No, direct sellers have a decidedly unique challenge in influencing and shaping the development of its army of entrepreneurs. That said, there is much that direct sellers can learn from the structured, methodical way that corporations train and develop their staff.

Here are the top seven lessons that direct sellers can learn from corporate training best practices:

1. Enable learning technology

Corporations have turned to learning technologies such as Learning Management Systems, chatbots, e-learning courses, e-learning libraries and alike to empower employees to be able to constantly learn and develop. These tools also allow the organization to manage and measure all the learning that takes place. Direct sellers can take advantage of the plethora of learning technologies that have been developed in the past decade to power the development of their field.

2. Hire instructional designers

Believe or not, there is an army of specialists whose expertise is designing training to be most effective for a learning audience. Direct sellers can tap into this talent pool to update their training materials to meet today's ever changing digital workforce.

3. Establish a training ROI sensibility and measurement infrastructure

In an always data-driven environment, corporations are insisting that every investment have an ROI associated with it. Why should training be any different? Smart organizations can tie training initiatives to business outcomes, thereby manage their investments strategically and wisely. Direct sellers should be able to ask themselves, "If we teach a certain skill, how can we measure its outcome?"

4. Identify skills gaps

A key element in many corporation's training strategy is to start with assessments to determine skills gaps. Whether a "360" assessment or some kind of personality guide assessment, helping people recognize

their strengths and gaps is an important prerequisite to getting their buy-in with whatever training they need.

5. Espouse a career-building philosophy

Today's workforce is accustomed to the idea that they are highly likely to switch jobs a number of times throughout their career. In fact, a recent PwC study showed that millennials most valued the opportunity to learn and grow when asked about what is most important to them in the workplace–rating it even higher than salary. Employers that help "up skill" their workforce do risk that they will be investing in their people only to benefit a future employer,but they risk even more by not training them. There is an purported exchange between executives of a major corporation that went like this:

> CFO: "What happens if we train our people and they leave?"

> CEO: "What happens if we don't and they stay?"

Corporations cannot afford to ignore building the skill sets and careers of the people they most depend on.

6. Make required training accessible and engaging

"Performance support" is a training buzzword that has really taken root among training professionals in recent years. The term refers to providing resources for an employee to help them do their job (e.g. imagine a job aid such as a picture of a pizza to help someone at a pizza store know what toppings to put on each type of pizza). In complex job functions like sales, providing resources at a learner's fingertips delivers huge value to the learning curve of that person. Direct selling companies need to deliver training resources right at the fingertips of their field and that training should be easy to navigate and intellectually engaging.

7. Understand the role of the manager

Corporations understand that training is only as effective as what lessons end up being applied on the job. Gone should be the days when someone attends a training and takes copious notes, only to forget everything learned a week later. Training is exponentially more effective when one's manager gets personally involved in the

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Source: https://www.pwc.de/de/prozessoptimierung/assets/millennials-at-work-2011.pdf

training process. For example, what if your manager approached you and said, "Vince, I'm sending you to a training to learn how to work pivot tables in a spreadsheet. This is a vitally important skill that our team doesn't have.When you get back, you'll teach it to the rest of us." In this scenario, how much more likely is Vince to pay attention and really focus on learning the training? A lot more. Similarly, if a new distributor's sponsor or leader took express interest in the training path of their new team member, that training would be that much more meaningful and effective.

Direct selling companies can benefit tremendously by implementing these ideas and best practices garnered from the corporate training industry and, as they do so, they will not only see a more successful sales field but also a more loyal one.

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