

The Invaluable Training Coordinator

By Jim Paluch

One person can make a difference! Before you embark on a long-term training program, consider enlisting a training coordinator, other than yourself, from your team. The person should be motivated to help others and want to improve communication, teamwork and service through the company. This crucial person will serve as planner, organizer, coach and lightning rod for your training efforts. It's best if you, as owner or manager, delegate this responsibility because a great training system empowers your team to think on its own.

I cannot over emphasize the importance of giving your team room to grow on its own and develop critical thinking skills. Growing your business depends on a cohesive team that can multiply your efforts. If you want to continue to learn, you'll need to trust others when you are away evaluating new business opportunities. If you want to enjoy a balanced life, you'll need leaders to fill in when you are recharging. If you want to work *on* your business and not *in* your business,

you'll need motivated people running the details.

Think about some of the most successful owners you know. Aren't they the ones who get to leave their businesses for industry events and networking opportunities? Aren't they the ones who talk about the terrific people they have in their companies? The secret to their freedom and success is their ability to delegate.

Here, in a nutshell, is our most important objective for starting down the trail towards creating a consistent training habit in your company: Grow leaders who will set you free to build your business.

As a leader is developed from within the team, momentum will also increase on your training program. One employee focused on your training program to insure that the guidelines for success are followed is one of the best insurance policies for continued training. This person will help you set the tone and encourage participation. He or she will manage the details of your company's training sessions so they start on time, end on time and meet the number-one objective — teach people to think.

You probably have someone right now who is ready, capable and eager to take on the role of training coordinator. This responsibility isn't a full-time job. You don't need to add another person to the payroll. In fact, the training coordinators in Training Challenge companies generally allocate about 1-3 hours each week for activities related to the position.

COORDINATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Communicate company commitment to the team. Everyone must know that the company is investing the time, money and effort into training for the good of the team and growth of each individual.

Maintain the training calendar. Determine what topics the team will discuss. Make adjustments according to needs. Allow flexibility for holidays.

Promote punctuality. Starting on time underscores the value of everyone's time.

Track attendance. Maintain attendance records. Compare attendance to topic themes/season; use the information to make adjustments.

Schedule presenters. Use the sessions to get everyone involved. Ask employees to present topics in their area of expertise. Invite guest speakers. Invite the owner to report on strategy and business updates.

Help presenters prepare. The training coordinator will quickly learn where to find information and how to organize presentations.

Keep meetings on track. The fastest way for training sessions to lose their credibility is when the discussion gets off topic or out of control. The training coordinator plays the role of firm process guide to keep everyone focused on the objectives.

Survey participants for feedback. Let participants offer suggestions to improve meetings.

Make adjustments to improve sessions. The sessions are for the benefit of your employees. The training coordinator should take a temperature reading occasionally to see if the team is getting enough value from the exercise, then make needed changes.

Communicate team ideas to owner/manager. When the team comes up with suggestions, share them with the owner.


Write and file meeting reports for future use. Lively, engaging training sessions generate open discussion and great ideas from your team that should be recorded. This is one of the most important roles of your training coordinator. The

post meeting paperwork should be in the form of a short template so your coordinator can quickly report any ideas and feedback. The reports will serve as blueprints for future sessions.

Promote a fun and energizing atmosphere. This is the key to promoting employee acceptance and longevity in your training program.

Recognize participants with great attitudes and super attendance. Your people are your business. They are your competitive advantage. You and your training coordinator should endeavor to let them know how much you appreciate them.

You're probably thinking this is too much additional work to heap on one person. It's true that the first couple of sessions are a learning experience for everyone, and the training coordinator will work extra hard at the beginning. However, once the meeting systems and expectations are clear to everyone, the process of getting organized and launching a session becomes routine, and the coordinator's job quickly gets easier. Enlisting volunteers isn't an obstacle either. Steve Pattie of the Pattie Group, a Training Challenge participant, says, "I am always put on a waiting list when I have a topic I want to train on. Sometimes there are 10-12 people ahead of me wanting to do a session...and that's great!"

It's time to start looking for that special person on your team who will lead your company to the next level of customer service and profits — your training coordinator. 

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CHALLENGE CALENDAR

- 21 Participating garden centers
- 94 Average number of employees trained per week

July Training Topics:

- "Team Watering Strategy"
- "Heat and Stress on People and Plants"
- "Staying Motivated Throughout the Season"
- "Goal Update — How We Are Doing"
- "The Sales Process — How We Obtain Customers"
- "Making the Best Use of Your Time"
- "Customer Recognition"

ACTION ZONE:

GARDEN CENTERS IN TRAINING

Market. Agway of Orleans and Dennis, Mass., is training its employees about organic gardening so they can provide better customer service and intelligently answer customer questions. They had a guest speaker from Cape Organics conduct two training sessions and felt it was very informative. They also had a guest speaker with years of experience in the fertilizer and grass business speak during their session on Basic Fertilizer Knowledge. They said they all learned some great information and asked lots of questions (especially the ones commonly heard from customers). Everyone finally learned what those three numbers on the fertilizer bag mean!

Training. Scott's Orchard & Nursery, Glastonbury, Conn., trained on nursery stock remedies and said that one of its goals this year is to increase hard goods sales. Scott's

believes product education for the staff will be the road to its success. The staff went over four products that can be used to battle insects and diseases. It has adopted the belief that any time the staff sells a plant, there is an opportunity to sell a product to go along with it.

Pleasant View Gardens, Loudon, N.H., held a session on identifying the quality of merchandise. Employees identified the criteria for judging quality, went out to the greenhouse to view examples, discussed borderline cases and illustrated the subjective nature of judging quality. Pleasant View's policy is: "If you wouldn't send it to your mother, you shouldn't send it to a customer."

Teamwork. Kennedy's Garden Center, Scituate, Mass., took a garden center tour during its training session. Team members learned where everything is and why. Employees will now

be able to work together more efficiently as a team to be more helpful to customers.

Systems. Scott's Orchard & Nursery trained its employees to properly handle landscape inquiries. With spring in full swing, the number of requests has increased dramatically, but requests are often made at a busy cash register, which can make it difficult to write down the information.

Pleasant View Gardens held a training session on Hanging Baskets Lines...Hanging Procedures. It came up with five procedures for hanging baskets: Identify the two different lines (each line is for a different size hanger); always hang only one size basket per line (water requirements are different for each size); fill the entire line with product; consolidate partial lines (saves on water and opens lines for new product); and replace any broken hanger pots before hanging.

Cost Control. Mulhall's Nursery, Omaha, Neb., held a training session about overhead costs and other profit killers. The session showed how much is billed per hour, dollars sold and how much ends up as profit. By doing this session, employees now have a clear understanding of what a slim profit margin there is and how they can help to control expenses and increase margin. Using visual aids and overhead charts helped explain the concepts to everyone who had no previous accounting experience.

Rewards. During a session on How to Be a Leader on Our Team, Mulhall's Nursery, Omaha, Neb., said it showed its employees how they can improve themselves and how that impacts their status in the company and improves their personal lives. Many employees asked questions and participated in extra activities. 