



ASTD – Orange County Monthly Learning Event January 30, 2008

Learning Executive Roundtable. Moderated by Linda Wallace, Vice President of Learning, Cardinal Health, and Vice President of Programs, ASTD-OC

Roundtable Panelists:

- Steve Hellman, Ed.D., C.P.T., Vice President, Leadership and Organization Development, Experian Americas
- Cathy Fletcher, Manager of Organizational Effectiveness & Learning, White Cap HD Supply
- Rob Gibbs, Director of Learning & Development, Disneyland Resort
- Barbara Van Dine, Director of Training and Development, Smart & Final LLC
- Connie Phillips, Sr. HR Development Specialist, City of Anaheim

Linda kicked off the discussion by stating that \$129.60 billion was spent on employee learning and development in 2006, according to the ASTD National's 2007 State of the Industry report. But those were flush times, before companies started incurring costs and economics started toying with the word: "recession." In an industry where training and development is usually viewed as overhead, how do you communicate your value to the corporate executives?

Let's turn to our panel of experts.

Introductions.

- Cathy: WhiteCap was owned by Home Depot, but has been spun off and sold to a private equity firm.
- Rob: Leads ILT, Leadership Development, and technical training.
- Barbara: Director of Training and Development for Smart and Final. 183 stores in CA, AZ, and NV. And Henry's grocery store. Operations training and leadership training.
- Steve Hellman: Vice President, Leadership and Organization Development, Experian Americas
- Connie: City of Anaheim. Teambuilding, employee relations, conflict resolution. Facilitates leadership development for the city.

- Linda:** *As a learning leader in your company, what do your CEOs expect of training? How do you prove your value to the corporation?*
- Connie:** "I solve problems." What are the current problems of the organization? Stressed the importance of training front-line supervisors (that's where you get sued).
- Steve:** "The CEO expects us to prepare the workforce." Driven by application results. Develop for the future. Hanging on to good people is a challenge.
- Barbara:** CEO has 3 foci: 1. Training dept. that knows how to get the job done without discussion; 2. Very competitive market; emphasis on cost-efficiency. Training must have a business driver; 3. Stay current with business market. "What do I know about the grocery industry? That's what he cares about."
- Rob:** 1. Uphold transitions/heritage of our park. How do we weave that into our onboarding and leadership development? 2. The workforce has changed. They don't have life skills or coping skills. i.e., show up on time. 3. "We have 16,000 hourly cast members." Onboarding is critical. We need to get cast members "show ready."
- Cathy:** 1. Basic training is seamless and integrated and happens invisibly. 2. We are involved in business initiatives. How does L & D support those projects? 3. Training can't just be in the classroom. Keep up with the pace of product changes.
- Linda:** *What are the best practices you use to sell your programs? What strategies would you recommend you recommend to be a success?*
- Connie:** Has personal relationships with most of the people she needs, due to the size of the organization. "We oversell solutions and undersell problems" – that's the problem [with our industry].
- Rob:** "If you have to explain to the executive why they need it, they either don't know they need it, or don't know what they don't know." Listening to what they need. Task forces are common at Disney. Recommends getting key people involved at the right time. Too late, and the project may derail. Too soon, and they peter out.
- Steve:** Leadership development can sometimes be perceived as "we can defer that this year." Have to get at the future of the business. We are growing rapidly by acquisition. How do you integrate these new people in? You have to have a common leadership philosophy. Senior Execs must participate in leadership development.
- Linda:** *What challenges do you see in interpreting what an organization THINKS they want from Training? ("Is it a training issue or a performance issue"?)*
- Barbara:** My mantra is "Training is the solution if skill is the problem." It's up to us to ask questions to try to understand the request. I get "Fred can't get along with his team so we need teambuilding." Challenge: It's not a training issue but a performance management issue.

Connie: “Never say no – just avoid saying yes.” Be careful – you damage the integrity of your training program if you have people in there who shouldn’t be. “Training is not the step prior to termination.”

Linda: In your industry, what are you paying attention to? Is the state of the economy affecting you?

Steve: There’s a huge impact. We’re in part in the credit card industry. We are slowing down in replacing people. Reducing costs and travel. Slowing programs down. Tuning up performance management skills. Retention is a problem. [Retention programs] can have an immediate impact on an organization.

Barbara: Don’t buy into the “cost of training” argument. We align with the business needs and find solutions to fix problems.

Linda: We’ve become who we are because of our successes. Can you describe on or two of your success? What return did it bring the organization?

Rob: Biggest success: emerging leader program. Start with cast members. Grew quickly. Needed more leadership. Program looks at hourly leads and develops a program around that. Also focusing on Guest Service Leaders. We forgot what it was like to have contact with cast members. Outcome of this program was a drop in turnover, reduction in grievances.

Steve: Focus on High Potentials for directors and vice presidents who can move into more strategic roles. CEO participates in this half-day program with CCL (Center for Creative Leadership). CEO asked how do we get a bigger bang for our buck? Participants were saying “I’m not applying the skills I learned.” We created a well-orchestrated action learning process. Participants spent 90 days working on a specific issue in the company, in their discretionary time. Lots of visibility and results were remarkable because we had people across organizational lines collaborating. People loved it. They got lots of exposure.

Linda: What’s on the horizon (good or bad) that will impact your strategy? How will you adjust?

Cathy: The Economy! Our business is B2B (business-to-business), selling to contractors. We position ourselves as relevant to what’s happening in the business. We are giving less emphasis to basic programs, Leadership, etc., and look at the hot topics: Sales Skills, etc. Focusing on immediate interventions. Understand the P&Ls and where the triggers are. We refuse to be left out of the picture.

- Linda:** *What value and adoption rate does e-learning have in your organization?*
- Steve: We have great acceptance of e-learning. In 1996 it was only in IT. It spread to sales and product education. We standardized the tools. We buy e-learning in some cases (e.g., Bright Line for sexual harassment prevention). It's getting good and is very engaging. E-learning is very much "the way we doing things around here."
- Linda: Salespeople will take e-learning if other salespeople recommend it. Use them – get them to sell it.
- Cathy: Employees wanted access to materials referred to in the e-learning. We redesigned our Intranet. Changed the whole way we organized information. \$1 million project. How can we create a Google for our employees? Added blogs. E-learning must be rich.
- Linda:** *Talent Management has invaded the LMS. It's all about talent management. Is training "Hire to Retire"? Is it integrated at your company?*
- Rob: Training is integrated. Talent Management is a little behind. 120,000 employees: how do we think about Talent Management? Have a Talent Management system in place. Still trying to push through the organization.
- Cathy: Succession planning is robust. High Potential identification can also be High Risk individuals. Know your audience. Knowledge Management is not just pushing out information but pulling in information. Employees are engaged because it's an interactive system.

Q & A Portion

Question: *How can I do e-learning when my audience is home-health care workers?*

Barbara: Don't think of it as a class. Break it into bits and pieces. "Training bulletins." Videos might work. Skip e-learning and go straight to podcasts. Everyone has them and they know how they work.

Question: *Does anyone use synchronous virtual classes?*

Linda: Good for software training. Worked well in high-tech. They will show up for an event.

Question: *How do you create a value creation and communication strategy?*

Steve: We track religiously whether the participants in Leadership Development get promoted. What are the results of the action learning program? He has given up on ROIs. No one asks about them. If you have enlightened leaders, they understand the value of it.

Cathy: I have a good relationship with the Director of Operations and their people. Not a direct ROI. Tie it to a change initiative.

Connie: Gotta have good organizational buzz. No metric can compete with that that.

Rob: We're focusing a lot on what are the things that they don't necessarily know, e.g. Showing up on time. Trying to stay ahead of them.

Barbara: We have job readiness issues with entry-level associates. Need to connect them to a long-term value, not just getting paid on Friday.

Rob: Just implemented executive coaching. Finding: if done as punitive it is not successful. Market it to high potentials executives and execs to be. Treat it as a perq.

Steve: We did executive coaching in the past when people were on their way out. Now, it's part of leadership development. You meet with a coach to review the 360s. They get used to it in the context of leadership development.