



KAW Consulting

Consultants in Human Resources

White Paper

Training on a Shoestring

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Training on a Shoestring

Note: For examples of materials developed in the format discussed below, see www.kawconsulting.com and click on any of our **Manager's Toolkit** offerings.

During periods of economic stress, your organization's success is extremely dependent on your employees' use of key business skills. Yet, even though critical, during an economic crunch, many organizations cut their training efforts dramatically due to the belief that spending money on training is far too expensive and an unjustifiable use of limited resources when the organization is looking to cut costs as much as possible.

As typical as this reaction is, it ignores the reality that during such times employees at all levels often face new challenges requiring new skills—from employees who need to work more collaboratively with other group members or colleagues from other sections, to Supervisors and Managers who suddenly face a whole new host of problems due to dealing with larger staffs and increasingly heavier demands on their time from both above and below.

As a Training Manager/Learning Director this presents you with quite a dilemma. How do you provide your employees with the support they need to learn and apply these new skills in their day to day jobs without spending a lot of money? The answer lies in creatively using what most of you already have at your fingertips to develop high value materials that you can put on your employees' computer desktop by simply sending them out as e-mail. Here's how:

Step 1: *Think Like an Employee—What Would You Want if You Were in Their Shoes?*

As a first step, start by pretending that you're the employee facing new job expectations, and are looking for something that would not only teach you what you need to know about the key new skills you need to use, but also provide you with tools you can use to apply these skills each time you use them. To find the right solution, you'd probably ask yourself the following types of questions:

- What am I expected to do that's different and challenging?
- What new skills does that take?
- What do I need to show me how to use these skills in my job?

The answers usually cause you to look for something that “shows me what I need to do, the steps I need to take, and has some application tools handy to refer to each time I need them.”

That's why employees have always loved checklists, “cheat sheets” and simple handbooks outlining the critical steps to apply a new procedure. That's why so often these items are the most popular take aways from a formal classroom training program. As a Training Manager, you can take advantage of this natural tendency and develop materials in this format.

Step 2: Ask People What They Are Dealing With and What Do They Need To Know?

The best way to find out what challenges people need help dealing with is to ask. Get some people in similar positions together and ask them questions like:

- “What’s changed about your job during the last few months?”
- “What things are the most challenging for you?”
- “What’s the most frustrating?”

Their answers will quickly point you to some common skills that people in that type of position need help with.

For example, ask a group of Supervisors or Managers the above questions and you may hear answers like:

- “I have to spend most of my time in meetings, and many aren’t productive.”
- “I’m not supposed to do the work myself, but I’m responsible for making sure it’s done right.”
- “I’m on all these special project teams, and we’re struggling getting things done.”
- “I’m split in 50 different directions.”

Answers like indicate that you should concentrate your efforts on providing support with things like:

- Designing and running better meetings
- Basic delegation skills
- Basic team project skills
- Time management

If you do this for each of the major types of positions in your organization, you will soon have a good handle on the most important type of support you can provide each group.

Step 3: What to Put in Your Materials

As mentioned previously, employees put a high value on easy to use checklists, and simple handbooks that show them how to do their challenging tasks. Consequently, you want to develop your materials in this type of format. Possible topics to include are:

- Basic information on the skill such as a definition, when to use it, etc.
- Basic success ingredients and pitfalls to avoid
- Frameworks or checklists that cover the basic steps to use each time they apply the skill.

Step 4: Format Your Materials So They Are Very Easy To Use.

Write in simple easy to understand language. Make liberal use of lists and bullet points, so the information can also serve as an application guide. Include a separate section just for forms and checklists. Be sure to include a Table of Contents. Include hyperlinks to take employees directly to the material they need.

Most materials can probably be developed using your company's word processing program. You can protect their integrity by putting them into a PDF file.

Step 5: *Distribute via e-mail.*

Many trainers overlook how easy it is to get materials in the hands of employees. Simply send them out via e-mail with the appropriate cover letter containing instructions on how to use and store them in a dedicated folder on their computer's desktop for easy access. Once they have a folder set up, you can add additional materials as needed. You could, of course, also have the materials accessible on your organization's intranet if you have one.

Step 6: *Use Materials as the Basis for Further Training*

Once distributed, you can also use the materials as the backbone for further training. One easy way to do so is to conduct any needed sessions by conference call or web conferencing software. Participants can access the materials on their computer during the session. For example, you might conduct a session with a group of employees on how to use the materials in some real life situations they face and bring to the call. You can also conduct sessions for Managers on how to coach their reports on how to use the materials on a day to day basis.

In sum, these methods and some creativity on your part can help you avoid the "we don't have any money" trap that derails so many training efforts, and start providing much welcome support to your organization's employees during very difficult times.