

# ROSSGROUPTRAINING

*LEADERSHIP \* PERFORMANCE \* GROWTH*



***STELLAR PERFORMANCE:***

***“BUILDING THE IMPACT OF LEARNING”***

Chief learning officers are not only responsible for ensuring learning is delivered to their organizations' workforce; they also must ensure that the learning is effective. Employees who are learning new job skills and job roles are sometimes just thrown into those roles by companies that take a sink-or-swim approach to training. But to ensure the success of strategic initiatives and build employee satisfaction and retention, smart learning executives will find ways to give those workers hands-on practice before turning them loose in their new or updated work environments. Thus the rise of simulations, action learning and other methods that allow workers to learn to crawl in a practice environment before permitting them to walk in the corporate environment.

Unfortunately, learning is often academic in nature, according to Dr. Seth Leibler, chairman and CEO of The Center for Effective Performance (CEP). "What happens is people look at how they were trained, and they replicate what was done to them, but it doesn't work too well in the workplace," he said. "It's much more oriented to telling than to practicing. For example, if you teach from an academic point of view, you're not really sitting before the training thinking, 'Exactly who are the trainees? What do they like, and what existing skills do they already have? What relevant past experiences do they have that we can build on in training? And precisely what do we expect them to do on the job?'"

This is all a part of Dr. Robert Mager's approach to Criterion Reference Instruction, Leibler explained. "Criterion Reference Instruction enables you to do this," Leibler said. "All that means is that each learner will demonstrate the skill they're learning at pre-specified criteria before they leave the training. It's really based on people practicing until they get it right, until they demonstrate the competence and when they demonstrate it to themselves. There are specific and measurable objectives, and they know when they can do it."

For years, professionals like airline pilots have learned to perform their duties through simulation technology. Traditionally used to teach hard skills, simulations allow workers to learn critical skills in a practice environment. But recently, simulations have adapted to the changing needs of the Information Age, training workers on everything from intercommunication skills to sales techniques. Through these simulations and lab environments, the organization allows its workers to prove their ability to handle new skills and duties.

Another example comes from the IT learning and training industry, where IT professionals earn certification through hands-on lab testing in order to demonstrate that they have the skills before performing those skills in a real work environment. Cisco Systems, Red Hat, Novell and others test IT professionals using live technology to determine their ability to perform on the job.

For higher-level learners, like those in leadership development or management training tracks, methods like action learning can help them learn new skills before tackling increased responsibility. Action learning was first defined by Reg Revans. Action learning brings together professionals to analyze a real problem in the organization and determine a plan for action. For example, a manufacturing company that wanted to improve its processes and reduce waste might assign a team of learners to assess the problem and determine



a solution. After proposing the solution to the company leaders, the team would then follow its implementation, adjusting for unexpected developments along the way.

But demonstrating hands-on abilities doesn't only prove to the organization that its employees can handle new and updated job roles. It also shows the workers themselves that they have the skills, giving them the confidence they need to perform effectively, which is what Mager's Criterion Reference Instruction is all about.

"There's a lot of research that says people really want to do a good job," said Leibler. "I am what I do, and that relates to quality." He explained that in order to do quality work, employees not only need to know exactly what is expected of them, but they also must have the confidence to perform.

"It's frustrating to know that state-of-the-art training can guarantee that each learner leaves training with the skills to perform their job at whatever level of proficiency the organization requires, no matter how high that is, and with the self-efficacy to apply those skills," Leibler said.

Albert Bandura, a professor from Stanford University, describes self-efficacy as people's beliefs about their ability to perform to desired standards. "He said skills alone aren't enough to get job performance to meet expectations," said Leibler. "In addition to skills, the learner has to have what Bandura calls self-efficacy—the individual's judgment about their capability to do something. It doesn't refer to the actual skill someone has, but to their belief about whether they can apply those skills."

Workers with strong senses of self-efficacy will be far more productive on the job. Those with a weak sense of self-efficacy will avoid challenges, doubting their ability to handle them. "If people judge themselves as unable to do something, they're not likely to even try to do it, even though they may be really skilled at doing it, because most people won't put themselves in a situation where they think they're going to fail," Leibler explained. "State-of-the-art training today not only will guarantee that everyone leaves with the skills to perform proficiently, but with the self-efficacy to apply those skills the next time, on the job, after training."