

THIS ISN'T YOUR PARENT'S WORKFORCE: THREE WAYS TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT HAS CHANGED IN TODAY'S MARKET

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Three ways training and development has changed in today's market.
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Traditionally, military training and development (T&D) has been concerned with developing leaders and alleviating skill gaps through means of stand up lectures. Just ten years ago, the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) Human Performance Practices surveyed 540 organizations about the types and methods of training offered. The organization reported that 84% of all training was conducted in the classroom, and videotapes and workbooks were the two most popular approaches to training.

Fortunately, military T&D has been transformed into a function that is tasked with educating the entire military workforce quickly and efficiently while engaging the learner through a myriad of technology-based tools. This change in perspective is due in part to the demographic shift in the workforce, a continuous global mission, and the technological revolution.

For the first time in U.S. history, four generations of people are working side-by-side: Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Gen Xers and Millennials. Each generation is influenced and defined by seminal events that shape their attitudes, values and work ethics. These beliefs and attitudes are brought to work every day and therefore lead to varied T&D needs. Hence, it is believed that the varied needs of each generation require a tailored approach to training.

The older generations such as Traditionalists (ages 65 and older) are repeatedly described as being stable, detail oriented, thorough and hardworking individuals. Ron Zemke, a notable expert in the study of generational differences states that Traditionalists are often "reluctant to buck the system." These workers can often display hesitancy in embracing new forms of technology and training methods. Unlike their younger counterparts, Traditionalists value consistency, uniformity, logic and law and order. These values often translate into training expectations such as logical, well-defined programs.

The eminent Baby Boomer generation (ages 48 to 64; the military's senior and executive leaders) are often characterized by values such as optimism, team orientation, personal gratification and personal growth. Unlike the Traditionalists, Zemke states that Boomers will often manipulate the rules to meet their own needs. Hence, this generation is more likely to redefine roles and expectations as a means of achieving the necessary growth in which training initiatives can present. Boomers will therefore value training programs in which they can get involved by hands-on participation.

The Gen Xer population (ages 28 to 47; the military's mid to senior level leaders) is best known for their high levels of cynicism, balance, informality, self-reliance, and pragmatism. This is a generation that chooses to remain guarded in their personal and professional lives. This sense of caution is primarily due to the fact that they saw many institutions crumble in their lifetime. This is a generation in which their parents were notable victims of downsizing and layoffs. Hence, the average Gen Xer's approach to authority is casual yet guarded. Therefore, training initiatives should focus on developing and garnering trust in creative and adaptable ways. Zemke

states that training programs geared towards this cohort should be technologically literate and up-to-date.

Like their immediate predecessor, the youngest generation in the workforce, the Millennials (age 27 and younger; the entry to mid level Soldiers and leaders), are also technosavvy. This is a generation that has begun to redefine roles as a means of adding value to the definition of their jobs. Millennials are confident achievers who are frequently characterized as being sociable, tenacious, diverse and optimistic individuals. These core values in combination with their technological adeptness lends to their need for training programs that will cater to their sense of collective action and team orientation. Such programs should present opportunities in which Millennials are able to employ such values and abilities.

In addition to the aforementioned generational differences that influence training initiatives; the fact that globalization has made it possible for Soldiers to work 24 hours a day everyday all around the world, results in a workforce that demands asynchronous web-based training. Moreover, the quick rate of change in technology and the infusion of web 2.0 into learning have taken T&D to another level.

In consideration of existent generational differences and in order for the military to remain competitive in the ever changing global market; an organization must reconsider all aspects of their business including training and development. As a result, training and development in concert with human resource departments are looking for cost effective methods to solve learning related challenges. It is therefore imperative that an emphasis is placed on the learning and HR function in which you, the individual Soldier and leader, have the opportunity to make a direct impact and assist organizations with issues associated with the shift in the workforce. In this article, the new function of training and development and the ways in which T&D has changed its role in the field of Human Resources are discussed:

T&D Change I: Technology and Training Materials

One of the most compelling changes in T&D revolves around the influence of technology and the delivery of training material. Currently, organizations utilize popular web 2.0 technology such as wiki's, blogs, and even Second Life to meet learning needs. Recently, Ace Hardware developed a social learning platform geared towards a handful of commercial dealers. The site had become so successful to the point where the organization expanded enrollment to include all of its retail stores.

Given the rapid advances in technology coupled with the learning needs of the different generations, training and development is no longer viewed as a one-size-fits-all approach. Melissa Hardy, a professor and director of the Gerontology Center at Pennsylvania State University stated that lecture style training is ineffective for Senior and Executive level Soldiers. Hardy indicated that these groups appear to be more visual and tactile and therefore learn best through means such as hands-on training. Furthermore, these generational groups may not respond well to asynchronous learning as a result of feeling uncomfortable with technology. To ease technology discomfort YUM! (the world's largest restaurant company) University constructs

learning material to meet the needs of the targeted population. For instance, when developing cross-generational course material, YUM! University makes sure that the content of the course being addressed fits the graphical, auditory and text size needs.

T&D Change II: A Change in Perception

Learning solutions are repeatedly overlooked due to lack of buy-in or until something goes wrong. In order to combat these issues and meet the needs of the changing workforce, military T&D initiatives need a change in perception. To facilitate this change, learning professional must be proactive in positioning themselves as partners with the organization. T&D should not be viewed as a standalone offering but as a strategic partner. According to the 2008 Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) report, 52% of respondents identified training and development as the number 2 most critical HR function. It is therefore imperative to develop a strategic relationship with the organization. For example, at Siemens the learning campus collaborated with key decision makers in each functional area and designed classes to meet each department's needs. Because of the strategic alignment, the department was able to provide value added solutions tailored to meet each department's needs.

T&D Change III: Knowledge Management

All too often key knowledge walks right out of the door. Often time is it due to turnover, retirement, or simply the lack of knowledge captured and transferred through the system. Some have estimated that by 2010, 40% of the U.S. workforce will be eligible for retirement. This statistic signals the need for organizations to implement a knowledge management system. Although most people have a general understanding of what knowledge management may be; the concept may be difficult to grasp at times. Fortunately, we offer four suggestions for training and development as a means of leveraging skill sets. These key points serve to encourage you to be an active partner in the development, facilitation, and evaluation of a knowledge sharing plan:

1. Identify key roles where knowledge needs to be preserved and transferred.
2. Determine the core competencies for each position.
3. Identify techniques to organize, update, and distribute knowledge.
4. Develop benchmarking technique to determine the effectiveness of the knowledge management system.

The change in workforce demographics, the strategic partnering of T&D with the military, and the technological revolution offers significant opportunities for the learning function. T&D has the chance to help influence the military's potential in achieving successful business results. However, if T&D disregard these opportunities, such issues will be addressed by those who are less qualified, or even worse, be ignored.