

Alternatives Workout Methods

HERE AT THE TRAINING ROOM we hear lots of excuses why people can't commit to working out in the weight—er, classroom. They range from “there isn't enough time in the day” to “it is too far to travel,” but we all know these reasons don't preclude a successful training program—they just require alternative workouts. With that in mind, let's talk about less-formal but still effective training methods.

Let's warm up with a short review of the ground we've covered so far. At your inaugural session (in the March/April 2007 issue), we talked about our program foundation: job-based training. This plan focuses on the specific regulatory aspects that impact each line unit's job function. On your next visit, we went over the cardio program to kick-start training and keep it ticking by maintaining your audience's attention. At your last workout, we covered the weighty considerations of classroom training.

Now that you are loosened up, let's get into your alternatives. Depending on what you want to accomplish with your workouts, you can probably train in the comfort of your office. You can hop over training by sending bulletins, skip through it by using managers, or even jump into it with e-learning. Let's look at each.

Communication Vehicles

Successful training programs do not require a full workout every day. In fact, there are days when it is more beneficial to rest your body so it can assimilate prior training. Likewise, you do not need full-scale training every time you send information to your line units. If your message is concise, consider sending it out in a bulletin. This would be appropriate if you wanted to let your audience know about a new requirement or remind them how to complete tasks that seem to be caus-

ing confusion. You can quickly create a communication that will be more readily absorbed. However, this “lite” training isn't always appropriate because it cannot provide much detail and there is no guarantee your audience will actually read it.

Manager-Led Training

On days when you just can't make it to the gym but still want to work out, consider going for a walk outside. After all, you don't always need to be confined indoors. Along the same lines, if you need to provide a more substantial message to your audience, tap outside sources such as department or branch managers. You can develop talking points for them to deliver at their next team meetings. This approach isn't quite as strenuous for you but still ensures a moderately consistent message will be delivered in a familiar setting with flexible timing to accommodate each area. As a bonus, it also underscores the manager's endorsement of your message. If needed, you can spend limited time with the managers to train your trainers. However, sometimes managers are part of the problem. If you decide to utilize manager-led training, take a little investigative walk to ensure that your message is being delivered accurately.

E-Learning

Some days you need a full-scale workout but on your own time and perhaps

without other people around. Pop in your favorite exercise DVD and follow along—especially if it encourages stretching and flexibility. In a similar vein, when you need to reach a wide audience with a comprehensive message, consider using e-learning. This workout gem allows your audience the flexibility to tune into the program at their own individual paces and lets them stop and start again as their schedules allow. It is the best way to reach a geographically diverse audience, plus through automation you can track when people complete their workouts. You can update the program fairly quickly when policies, procedures, or regulations change. The downside to this virtual workout is that it does not involve the same personal touch as having a trainer present and some employees may not have access to computers. And creating e-learning modules can be a challenge: Developing your own PowerPoint skills can be intimidating while vendor start-up costs can be expensive.

Power of Pointing

First there was power walking, then came PowerPointing. If you decide to create your own e-learning materials, remember that you can keep it simple. Just as workout tapes with too many instructions can overwhelm you when you try to understand what steps they are taking you through, remember to take things slow with your audience. When writing your materials, try using a method called “chunking,” wherein each of your basic lessons is considered a chunk. Think of a chunk as a step in the exercise program. For each chunk, the basic steps should be conveyed in three to five slides,

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followed by one review slide and a quiz that asks learners to try it themselves with a quiz question. Then move on to your next exercise/chunk. But remember, adults have 20-minute attention spans, so e-learning modules should not exceed this time frame.

Also remember that as with exercise DVDs, it is the core training that is important; the glitz surrounding that main message just helps it go down easier. Just make sure you don't include so many attention getters that your audience is more focused on your fireworks than on the points you are trying to make. For instance, using color is great, but use no more than three per slide. You can always switch color schemes when you shift into a new chunk of material. Graphics give the material added emphasis, but limit them to one image per screen. Use photos to give the presentation a more realistic feel. Animation will liven things up too, but make sure you don't go overboard in a way that overwhelms your learners.

If you don't feel confident enough to create your own e-learning courses or don't have the time, there are many existing vendor solutions. Consult with industry associations as well as commercial vendors to see what options are available to you in your price range. When comparing products, ensure that they are compatible with your bank's systems. Because it is important to train on your own procedures rather than just the law, also make sure you can customize the material to reflect your bank's policies.

Benefits of Both Worlds

The most effective workout plan blends both traditional weight room training with alternative training methods to get the benefits of both. When possible, you can return to the classroom for the personal touch to ensure your audience is on track with the efficiency of e-learning. For example, you could send out assignments online or integrate an e-learning module into classroom training to

break things up a bit.

Regardless of whether you work out using the weight room or an alternative method, it is important to ensure that your efforts are achieving the desired results—in other words, test your students to ensure they got it. On your next visit, we'll talk about how to create effective test questions, whether it is OK to allow open books, and what you can learn from analyzing the results.

See you at the next session, in the November/December issue. BC

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