

TRAINING PARTNER

Training should be a seen investment, but to really reap the rewards you need to have clear objectives, says Gary Fallaize.



OVER THE years I have witnessed good, bad and ugly health and safety training. Any investment in training should provide an organisation with measurable business benefits such as increased productivity, reduced costs and a more competent workforce. Whether a good return on investment is achieved is determined by the motivation that drives the training and the selection of the training itself.

Simplistic compliance or “tick box training” is not uncommon and has the least overall business benefit. The motivation behind this type of training stems from an organisational culture that either sees health and safety training as a barely necessary evil or solely as a matter of compliance. Selection of training is based on the course with the least cost and least time away from “more productive” work. The desired outcome is to show evidence of training; usually to satisfy potential clients, the enforcer or insurance providers.

Training selected on this basis usually provides poor long-term benefits to the recipients other than the training record as proof that they have been trained. I have seen the battles between health and safety teams and other management teams, such as HR or Operations, where genuinely good ideas for training initiatives are watered down to the minimum that a company can get away with. Even accidents and/or visits from the HSE do not change attitudes, as controlling minds within the organisation do not see health and safety training as a worthy investment.

“Vanity” or “Don’t we look good training?” can also be questionable. Where the PR opportunity drives a desired message “we care about our workforce”. The training delivered can be superficial and has minimal value other than feeding the companies PR initiative. This type of training can be seen in sectors where companies are

competing for clients and contracts. Don’t get me wrong; using PR to promote an organisations safety performance and training initiatives is a positive thing and should be encouraged. But PR itself should not be the sole motivation for the training.

Fortunately most organisations are far more enlightened. They understand the real financial, social and business advantages that flow from investing in appropriate and effective health and safety training. These organisations do not have unlimited time and budgets; they simply ensure that training is aligned to and promotes their overall health and safety objectives. Of course, reaching these objectives is not all down to training. Effective policies and management systems, staff engagement, and, very importantly, visible management commitment and leadership provide the framework where appropriate training adds real value.

Getting the best return from a training investment is complex and should be based on meeting recognised objectives. Objectives such as reducing Lost Time Incidents, improving workforce morale or job satisfaction, or supporting and improving the safety culture of the organisation.

Assuming that the training objectives have been identified, choosing the most appropriate qualification for your organisation is the next challenge.

Some qualifications are relatively straight-forward to identify with recognised training schemes for certain high risk activities, specific skills, use of machinery, etc. What can be more challenging is identifying general health and safety training requirements. These are often essential to building and enhancing a good awareness and understanding of health and safety, and underpin the creation of a positive safety culture. There are many certified courses available from various awarding bodies covering the entire spectrum of

general safety training requirements, from basic induction to diploma level qualifications. Details of these types of courses are readily available and have the advantage of providing a recognised certificate for successful completion. However the content is usually fixed with little customisation possible. Alternate options include non-accredited courses offered by training providers or developing bespoke courses to meet your organisation’s specific needs.

Having established the type of course, the next decision is how the training will be delivered. There are many choices with training providers offering a wide range of delivery methods: face to face, online, workshop, case study, etc. All have their advantages and disadvantages and it is essential to select the most appropriate method for your intended learners.

Selecting a training provider is another very important decision and will determine the value you obtain from your training. A training provider’s accreditation is a useful indicator of their competence, but often simply give a measure of accrediting authorities’ process compliance and trainer qualifications. They do not necessarily provide a guarantee of high quality training. Price is also a factor. But paying more does not always mean you get better quality. And paying less does not have to mean less value for money. Individual trainer CVs and course material samples are useful indicators of training provider quality. Ultimately, the real test is meeting the individual who will be leading or delivering the training so that you can determine their personal competence in the development and delivery of the course.

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