

Five Best Practices for Developing Experts on Your Team

How to Foster Learning That Benefits Both Employer and Employee

Employees have always hungered for meaning and success in their careers; and employers have always sought continuous improvement from their people. Winning companies now face the urgent imperative to develop and manage organizational expertise or risk losing key people, critical institutional knowledge, and market competitiveness. Why expertise? Because it's the knowledge people use to get things done. And more is better, but most companies, to their detriment, don't think about managing expertise and thus don't achieve the almost universal goal of expanding it.

Best Practice 1

Establish Baselines

Any program must begin with a clear view of the current level of expertise within the team, for each employee. Failure to understand where a team is coming from essentially renders it impossible to measure how effectively they have been guided to a destination.

It is important to measure expertise based on what is necessary for each individual to effectively do their job – or to stretch to other responsibilities. Whether an employee's future includes moving up the corporate ladder, or extending their expertise across functional areas, they still must execute meaningful work. In practical terms, this

means evaluating their effectiveness based not on "academic" knowledge, but on the possession of usable, functionally specific skills and overall business acumen.

Best Practice 2

Tie Learning Activities to KPIs

While building expertise among the team is one of the best ways to improve productivity and engage employees, the number one challenge managers face is to justify the cost.

Plan ahead to associate your learning program with core KPIs right from the start. As you craft each individual's plan, ensure what they learn will build new skills, which will in turn allow for measurably superior performance. In today's fast-paced world, demonstrating that the books close faster, or that understanding revenue recognition impact ensures contracts are signed one week earlier, or any of a myriad of different processes have been improved is the surest path to maximizing the ROI – and effectiveness – of a learning program.

Best Practice 3

Collaboratively Set Goals with Team

Having an expertise baseline helps managers chart a course that improves the overall skill set and productivity of a department or team. It does not, however, put a pathway in front of the individuals who must now do the work of self-improvement.

You can increase the likelihood of success by transparently working with team members to understand – and build a learning path to

achieve – their short-, medium- and long-term goals. The opportunity to expand “vertically” via promotion and “horizontally” across the organization can be highly appealing to existing and prospective employees. Collaboration between manager and employee makes both sides aware of the other’s care and builds meaningful engagement. By collaborating with each learner, functional leaders can build learning programs that deliver maximum value for the learner as well as the manager and the organization, and have the highest levels of commitment and, ultimately, success.

Best Practice 4

Continuously Review & Update

Team members who regularly review their goals and activities are better able to understand the ways in which what they’re doing are impacting both their development and their standing within the team.

A regular conversation also reinforces the need to complete those courses that have been mandated by managers, and provides the opportunity to review, adjust, and add to the list courses that employees have themselves discovered and wish to take.

In the end, it is the shared ownership of the development plan that results in engaged and satisfied employees who build their expertise in ways that are additive to the productivity of the team. And it is the best way to turn a learning program into an effective retention program.

Best Practice 5

Use In-House Experts to Tailor Content

Third party content doesn’t address all the needs you have within your own organization. Effective learning happens when high-level knowledge is combined with the context and expertise that is handed on from the leaders of today to the leaders of tomorrow through specific examples, case studies, and real-world experiences that have occurred in your company or industry.

An effective learning program, then, should combine information-rich third party content with organizationally-sourced expertise transference. Bring in the individual who most effectively completes a process, and have them share that. Then put that course into a shared, online, on-demand repository, and make it a part of all affected employees’ learning plans. That combination of broad “functional” knowledge, and targeted, company-specific execution skills, will turbo-charge the results of your overall learning program.

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