

Newsletters - Managing Training & Development

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How to Survive When Running a One-Person Training Department

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Hardy souls that run small or one-person training departments know the sensation of running standing still. You're all things to everyone in the organization and if there's a problem (e.g., low productivity, morale issues), training is the answer. You're an expert on assessment, design, delivery, and evaluation of training. And you're handling your personal development and career planning as well, joining with management to plan the organization's goals and future strategy.



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There are challenges, of course, many that are not unique to small training departments: bureaucratic snafus, learner resistance to training, a lack of resources (read: money and time) and just plain too much to do.

A survival plan. Even that condensed version of a much bigger playing field seems a bit overwhelming. Can training managers succeed, even thrive, in such an environment? We believe you can, with planning and resourceful thinking. Carol McCoy, Ph.D., owner and president of McCoy Training and Development Resources (MTDR; Falmouth, Maine; www.mccoytraining.com; 207-781-7515), agrees, having been a one-person training department herself. McCoy is also the author of *Managing a Small HRD Department* (MTDR, 2003, Jossey-Bass; 1993) and *In Action: Managing the Small Training Staff* (ASTD; 1999).

"Managing a small training department, especially when you are the only trainer, can be daunting," McCoy explains. "Your personal skill and competency level has a significant effect on your ability to deliver effective training."

A word on competencies. Although *MTD* eschews buzzwords, the term "competencies" has so inserted itself into the business nomenclature that it's impossible to avoid using it. In fact, it may be useful to refer to "competencies" because the term encompasses skills, knowledge, abilities and even attitude and behaviors required to perform well.

Indeed, the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD; www.astd.org), in an effort to build the training profession, has just published the *ASTD 2004 Competency Study: Mapping the Future*, to provide a "strategic roadmap for today's workplace learning and performance (WLP) professional." (ASTD Press; www.astd.org; Cost: \$69.95)

What competencies will you need? There are five core competencies that small training department managers should work on developing, McCoy believes. (Of course, these are important for training managers in all sizes of organizations; however, they're frequently overlooked in work situations where you're "it.") *They are:*

1. Business competencies (business and industry knowledge; organizational knowledge; financial management). This is probably the most critical area that training managers in all departments of all sizes overlook, we believe. It's hard for training professionals that are true believers in learning and development to make this mental shift: It's not about training. It's about the business of your organization and what training can do to support it.

"We can't do fluff or nice-to-do training anymore," McCoy stated. "When you think about training, it must be in the context of your organization: Are you releasing a new product? Will there be merger and acquisition activity? Diversity initiatives? Growth or contraction? Make training meet these needs."

Steps to take: Ask to be included in corporate finance and planning meetings or volunteer to work on a business-related project. Read, even if your time is precious, business journals, corporate communications (annual reports, financials, etc.), Web sites, and the like. Look for a mentor in a key business division, and then listen and ask questions so you know all the key business drivers and influences on your organization. Attend conferences or Webinars whenever possible and go to the sessions that focus on the business of training.

2. Interpersonal competencies (communicating; inspiring others; managing expectations; building relationships; managing resources). As you know, training is not always the answer to an organizational problem. You must be able to communicate that, and offer alternative solutions, without sounding like you're refusing to provide training. Your training department serves the organization, to be sure, but your goal is to be a partner with various departments.

Steps to take: Ask trusted corporate advisors for feedback on how your department is perceived. Spend time with department heads in each business division. Ask them what keeps them up at night; then begin to formulate ways that training can help.

3. Intellectual competencies (prioritization and decisionmaking; organization and project management; strategic thinking). Time management is important, McCoy noted, but even more critical is energy management—putting your full focus into priority items that have organizational impact.

Steps to take: See number 1.

4. Human resource development (HRD) technical competencies (needs assessment; knowledge of HRD and performance consulting; e-learning; facilitation of learning; consulting). The gap between what people know and what you want them to know is a critical piece of your training department strategic planning. "We can no longer train because that's what we do; we must train with a purpose: human development and, ultimately, performance."

Steps to take: Listen in on customer calls at your organization or sit with staff in a department that, according to its manager, "needs some training." McCoy once shadowed people in the billing department of a large organization and was surprised to find that employees spent most of their time fire-fighting, dealing with people crises that were completely unrelated to billing. If you know an associate at a non-competitor company in your area, ask to attend one of its training programs. You will learn a lot.

5. Personal competencies (positive attitude; resilience; flexibility). These competencies cannot be overlooked. Resilience is especially important when you operate a micro-department. Change is a given in nearly every organization, so you must prepare to expect it and be able to handle it.

Steps you can take: First and foremost, take time for yourself. Reflect and plan; write in your

journal; *start* a journal; network with colleagues.

Where to start? To help you get started on your own personal competency gap analysis, McCoy has provided an assessment survey you can use to self-rank your competency development (see the sidebar, "Competencies for Managing a Small Training Department Assessment Survey"). After you complete the rankings, McCoy recommends making an action plan (see steps to take, above).

Why is this important? Small training departments especially struggle with credibility. They often operate in a reactive mode, McCoy notes, the product of "training can fix everything" thinking. As a result, many one-plus training department managers languish or even burn out, forced to do too much with too few resources. With an honest self-assessment and an action plan, training professionals at even the smallest training departments can grow professionally and begin to make a meaningful business impact.

Resources. Go to the One Person Training Department Web site (www.onepersontrainingdepartment.com) for a community of free resources. Also visit McCoy's Web site (www.mccoctraining.com) for free tools and training articles.

For more on training manager competencies, see the ASTD 2004 Competency Study: *Mapping the Future: New Workplace Learning and Performance Competencies* (www.astd.org).

Competencies for Managing a Small Training Department Assessment Survey

Area	Specific Competency	Rating	Priority
Business Competencies	<p>Business and industry knowledge—understanding of business dynamics and key success factors in your industry; understanding performance measures.</p> <p>Organizational knowledge—understanding your organization's goals, strategies, priorities, culture, key measures.</p> <p>Financial management—budgeting, projecting income and costs; tracking variance; working within a budget; calculating return on investment and business impact of programs.</p>		
Interpersonal Competencies	<p>Communicating—active listening; attending to others; getting your message across; giving and receiving feedback; writing clearly, using correct grammar and spelling.</p> <p>Inspiring others—building sponsorship; motivating others; advocating for training; getting stakeholders to care.</p> <p>Managing expectations—contracting; setting and managing expectations; explaining when training is not the solution.</p> <p>Building relationships and networking—actively building relationships inside and outside your organization.</p> <p>Managing resources—identifying, selecting, and working effectively with internal subject-matter-experts and external resources (consultants, professors, interns, etc.).</p>		
Intellectual Competencies	<p>Prioritization and decisionmaking—setting priorities based on needs; making decisions based on priorities.</p> <p>Organization and project management—organizing to be productive; planning and tracking multiple tasks and projects.</p> <p>Strategic thinking—seeing the big picture; identifying strategies to accomplish short- and long-term organizational goals.</p>		
HRD Technical	<p>Needs assessment—using a range of methods to identify and</p>		

Competencies	<p>prioritize gaps in learning and performance; distinguishing training needs from other types of needs.</p> <p>HRD knowledge—designing, managing development of learning and performance solutions; evaluating effectiveness of solutions; using adult learning theory; performance consulting.</p> <p>e-learning—understanding requirements for effective e-learning; managing e-learning resources and evaluating e-learning effectiveness.</p> <p>Facilitation of learning—leading adult groups to encourage learning face-to-face and through technology.</p> <p>Consulting—working with clients to identify problems and to find workable solutions; using appropriate consulting style for the situation.</p>		
Personal Competencies	<p>Positive attitude—being optimistic; seeing opportunities in any situation; staying upbeat; avoiding burn-out.</p> <p>Resilience—bouncing back from change, challenges, stress and difficulties; being proactive and open to change.</p> <p>Flexibility—envisioning a wide range of solutions; adjusting approach in mid-stream; willing to choose a good solution even though it isn't perfect.</p>		
Other (for your situation)			
<p><i>Rating scale:</i></p> <p>1 = Novice; not much knowledge or skill in this area</p> <p>2 = Moderate level of competence</p> <p>3 = Strength; can do this easily</p> <p>4 = Expert/master; can teach or train others to do this</p>			
(Source: McCoy Training and Development Resources)			

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