KB CommEntary

Greetings!

Back to School!

Welcome to the late-summer 2009 issue of *KB CommEntary*, the KB COMM e-newsletter. At KB COMM, we provide mission-critical communication and learning services to clients in a variety of industries.

As we watch the kids march off to school again, we decided to pick up on the education theme. This issue of *KB CommEntary* discusses some important things to consider as you plan for employee training.

What's Up at KB COMM?

We are pleased to announce that KB COMM is now a certified Women's Business Enterprise. This means that we are officially qualified to participate in corporations' woman- and minority-owned vendor programs.

Thanks to our loyal clients for keeping us fully engaged. Recent and ongoing projects include:

- Developing instructor-led technical training courses for clients in the pharmaceutical industry
- Creating forms with macros to populate spreadsheets in Microsoft Excel
- Managing translation of several user guides into seven languages for a medical device manufacturing company
- Writing a business plan for a research organization
- Writing sales brochure copy for a healthcare diagnostics manufacturer
- Writing website copy for a high-tech manufacturer
- Writing and formatting chemical residue studies intended for regulatory submission on behalf of a federally funded cooperative program
- Writing supplements and formatting modules of electronic submissions to FDA for a pharmaceutical manufacturing company

We might be busy, but we are always ready for more. Please keep us in mind for help with your communication or training projects.

Tips and Tales

Be Smart About Employee Training

A well-trained staff is essential to any enterprise. But designing, developing, and delivering a curriculum that teaches employees the knowledge and skills required to be effective and productive is much easier said than done. How many times have you sat through a class and wondered how you could apply it to the day-to-day challenges of your job? Have you ever been required to take an online course dealing with business ethics or similar subject matter that, although probably appropriate for some employees, really didn't apply to you?

All too often, employee training ends up missing the mark. Obviously, poorly designed or implemented training costs employers money, both in terms of sunken development and delivery cost as well as lost productivity. But even more insidious is the negative effect bad training can have on employee attitudes about learning and development, the managers who instructed them to take the training, and ultimately the company itself.

We can't tell you everything you need to know about designing and implementing employee training in a newsletter. But here are a few important questions that often seem to go unasked and considerations that are overlooked:

Is training really necessary? Just because a knowledge or skill gap exists does not mean that training is always the best or most cost-effective solution. For many routine tasks, a well-designed job aid (aka "cheat sheet") or a quick, informal lesson from a knowledgeable colleague provides adequate task support for employees to perform successfully.

Who needs to know or do what? This is the toughest question to answer, and it tends not to receive the attention or energy it demands. When considering the "who" aspect, begin by identifying and analyzing the functional roles employees actually play in the organization. Think of functional roles as logically grouped sets of tasks or activities required for the enterprise to operate.

Note that job titles and descriptions often do not accurately depict all the tasks that employees really do, and that employees often perform in roles that overlap job descriptions. For example, administrative assistants, supervisors, and human resources specialists all likely perform some of the same administrative tasks.

Next, identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities someone needs to perform effectively in a given role. Note that knowledge and skills are different assets, and training meant to impart knowledge must be designed and delivered differently from training that teaches skills.

After you identify functional roles and specify the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for each role, conduct a gap assessment that identifies which individuals lack what knowledge, skills, and abilities based on the functional roles they perform. From the gap assessment, you can identify the greatest areas of training need and develop appropriate interventions.

Can you commit the required resources to training design, development, delivery, and reinforcement? In addition to qualified instructional designers and instructors, subject matter experts must be available to provide and review course content. Subject matter experts often are very busy, and spending time on a training project may not be a priority for them. However, without their active involvement, training is less likely to be successful. Likewise, the people designing and delivering training must be qualified to do so.

Another thing to consider is what happens after training is delivered. Is there a plan in place to reinforce learning with meaningful, on-the-job activities in an appropriate time frame? Studies have shown that adults substantially retain learning only if it is reinforced within 72 hours of delivery. If learning is not reinforced immediately and meaningfully, adults retain only 10% of what they learned four weeks after delivery.

The most important thing to remember is that designing and delivering training is a significant investment for an organization, both in terms of money and people's time.

And please remember, *when it has to be right*, KB COMM is here to help.

Sincerely,

Kathy

Kathy Breuninger