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Interpersonal Effectiveness Training: Know Yourself, Control Yourself, Know Others

Companies are encouraging employees to build more effective relationships via interpersonal effectiveness training, but there is a surprisingly basic disconnect between what has been identified as successfully implemented interpersonal training and what organizations actually do. A new study from research organization Tracom Group gathered data from professionals in charge of selecting, delivering and creating interpersonal training programs and found best practices such as administering an interpersonal effectiveness instrument prior to a training program, providing a foundational review of materials prior to a program, offering real-life work examples and doing follow-up assessments and measurements to verify knowledge transference are lacking in organizations' current interpersonal effectiveness training offerings.

"Some of the larger gaps that occurred were in the ability to provide program assessments and measurements as to how people were doing once the interpersonal skills training had been delivered, and perhaps more importantly was the ability to reinforce the learning through follow-up workshops or online tools," said David Collins, vice president and general manager of the Training Solutions Group, Tracom Group. "Ninety-two percent believed the first one was important but only 46 percent actually implemented it. The second one, 84 percent thought it was important and only 38 percent implemented it."

Collins surmised that the implementation gap could be due to a lack of resources. It's also possible that organizations purchase incomplete or unsuitable solutions. For those looking to change the desired interpersonal effectiveness program details into real on-the-job applications, in the ideal interpersonal effectiveness training program learning leaders should first understand exactly why they want to offer this type of training to employees and what type of skills will be delivered. Furthermore, when high-level positions such as learning managers and CLOs pursue interpersonal effectiveness training, the required skill set is often amplified according to the level of impact they have in an organization. Thus, it becomes necessary to spend more time on that training.

"Once you understand the audience you're looking to deliver there are two kinds of interpersonal effectiveness deliveries being delivered out there," Collins said. "The first was on a stand-alone basis where people deliver interpersonal effectiveness as a general skill. The second one people were delivering interpersonal effectiveness specific to the job role. In other words, as a manager how does interpersonal effectiveness play in your position? What are some of the key tasks and skills you're required to execute as a manager? How is it that successful interpersonal effectiveness helps you execute those tasks and skills better? Understand that audience and then tailor that program or tailor your delivery to the actual job roles and job functions that people provide."

Collins said it's also important to make sure you're allocating enough classroom time for interpersonal effectiveness training, but classroom training is not all that's required. "One of the trends we noticed in the report, the amount of time organizations are allotting to interpersonal effectiveness is decreasing on a classroom basis. Training doesn't simply end at the end of the classroom. If you really want to have an

impact and skill transference, you're doing things post-classroom as well, both in providing job aides that can be taken back to the job as well as providing some kind of measurement or follow up learning event. It doesn't necessarily need to be a classroom-driven event. It could be online."

If interpersonal effectiveness training is done correctly, participants will gain self-awareness and understand personal behavioral preferences. They'll understand what the strengths of their personal behavioral preferences are as well as the weaknesses as perceived by other people. "We're looking at, 'How are you using your interpersonal skills between multiple individuals that you're working with?' We actually teach people first to know yourself. Then, once you know yourself you understand what your strengths and weaknesses are so that when you're interacting with others the next thing that you do is control yourself. You realize that if you tend to be dominant when talking in conversation you might pause, listen and ask questions, for example. If you tend to be more reserved and need a lot of details, data and facts before reaching a decision you might put out a little bit and declare a little bit earlier in a conversation than you otherwise would.

The next thing is knowing others. Once you understand that there is this world of behavioral styles out there and that you are a certain type of behavioral style and (whomever) is a certain type of behavioral style, because I am able to identify what your behavioral style is I can modify my behavior and my approach to you in a way that you find most effective. You do something for others, but it might modify your approach and potentially do something for you as a manager teaching others. Ideally you would do that in context or have an understanding of how that plays out in your daily interactions with people. For example, if you're in a selling capacity or a managing capacity or a team capacity those daily interactions are slightly different, but interpersonal effectiveness basically goes over the top of all of those job roles."