TRAINING SPOTLIGHT

Avoid the "White-Out Cure"

At a visit to a firm to discuss training needs many years ago, I noticed a bottle of White-Out next to every printer on my way to the administrator's office. After the administrator declared there was no need for training, I asked about the correction fluid.

The firm was using WordStar, which automatically printed page numbers at the bottom of every page. Because no one knew how to omit the page number on the first page, they whited-out the page number and xeroxed it.

Had they known the correct code to omit the page number on the first page, this would have taken five seconds. Their strategy took 10 minutes every time they printed a document. From that point on, we labeled any convoluted answer to a simple problem "The White-Out Cure."

How do you know if your staff is using a White-Out cure? How do you know if the programs are being used effectively?

Assume you have migrated to a new program and have provided the right amount of training and floor support. It's now six months later. Are your systems being used effectively?

1. Have a trainer walk around and talk to users. Let everyone know that a trainer will be around. If the trainer is someone who may be a stranger to some people, have him or her wear a badge that says, "Ask Me…."

Ask the trainer to stop at each desk and ask how things are going. Users may not feel comfortable calling the help desk or e-mailing for support. A trainer will elicit questions. The trainers can answer questions but should also keep a list of the questions for possible mini training sessions or "Lunch and Learn" sessions. Trainers should also look for forms that could be made into automated templates.

2. Use the Help Desk log to design targeted training sessions. If you have a help desk log, review it from time to time. At a very large firm, we noticed several questions appearing regularly about Excel. We designed a half-day class on the most frequently asked questions.

3. Use the Help Desk log to determine the effectiveness of the training. After we ran classes we went back to the help desk log. The frequency of those questions had decreased significantly.

4. Schedule monthly "Lunch and Learn" sessions. Make these sessions fun! Have the secretaries submit their worst documents. Offer a prize for the document with the worst format. As a group, clean up the document.

5. Run monthly contests for the best formatted documents.

6. Perform a spot check of documents. Are styles being used? If they are being used, are they being used optimally?

On-going evaluation of skill level and staff needs will insure that you won't find the "White-Out Cure" at your firm.

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