

CORPORATE HRM



Brand: Mehta Solutions
Product Code: case1299
Weight: 0.00kg

Price: Rs500

Short Description

CORPORATE HRM

case study

Description

CASE – 3 Enhancing the Credibility of the Training Function: Involving Line Managers in Sales Training

“Rakesh let me make it clear to you that I can’t allocate any more money for training. I can understand why you want to conduct a training program on coaching skills for the line managers, but I can’t help you in this regard. Not for another year at the very least. In fact, I may have to curtail your training budget for next year as we are going through a lean phase,” said Sanjay Shah (Shah), the CEO of Dirc2U, a direct sales company that dealt in a range of consumer appliances. From his tone, it was clear that he would not entertain any further discussion on this topic.

Rakesh Sharma (Sharma) had been working as the training manager (TM) in Dirc2U for the past three years. During this period he had single-handedly taken care of all the training and development (T&D) activities of the company. Of late, he

felt that despite a contemporary training program, the sales force was unable to internalize the training due to lack of support from the line managers in the field. Sharma, who had ample experience in sales and sales force management before getting into the training function, understood the significance of the role of line managers in reinforcing the class room training. His repeated proposals to conduct a training program on coaching for the line managers had fallen on deaf ears. But Sharma knew that he could not let the situation drift any longer. The company had failed to achieve its revenue targets in the previous year. This year too, it was struggling to reach 75 percent of the projections. Since it was difficult to measure the return on investment (ROI) of training, the training budget tended to get the chop during tough times. In such a situation, Sharma could expect some cuts in his budget for the next year. Yet he knew that in tough times there was a greater need for T&D interventions. He also knew that if things got even tougher, and the company decided to cut costs even more, the job of the TM would be one of the first to go.

Sharma was almost certain that he would convince Shah regarding the importance of this specific T&D plan for the line managers. But no amount of persuasion could budge Shah. Sharma's hope of involving the line managers in making sales training more effective seemed unlikely, at least in the short term. Now he had to find some other way to make the sales training more effective. He also decided to look at ways to project the importance of training to the top management.

Before joining as the TM in Dirc2U, Sharma had worked in another direct sales company for ten years in various capacities – sales representative (SR), area manager (AM), and then regional manager (RM). During his tenure there, he had developed an interest in T&D. Three years ago, when he saw the advertisement for the post of training manager in Dirc2U, he immediately applied for the post. Though he did not have any formal qualifications for the job, his ten years of experience in the sales function saw him through the interview process. Sharma was in the habit of regularly updating himself on issues related to this job and his other interests. In addition to his experience of providing on-the-job training (OJT), the interview panel headed by Shah was impressed by his understanding of different issues related to the training function.

A lot had changed since then. Sharma had conducted about 50 training programs in three years. He had conducted basic sales training courses for new entrants as well as refresher courses for all sales people on an annual basis. His long stint in the

industry helped him to design very contemporary and, at times, innovating training courses. During implementation of the training programs, Sharma generally avoided the over-used lecture method as much as he could. His training programs had lots of scope for interaction, experience-sharing, feedback and practice. He facilitated understanding of key issues through the use of real life stories and anecdotes. This made his sessions informative as well as interesting. Many of the trainees were attracted towards his personality due to his cheerful countenance and as he was very approachable. He used a lot of role-plays to reinforce the learning points and skills, and assess the transfer of learning/skills. He also made it a point to visit key customers with the SRs whenever there were no training programs. This helped him to understand important operational issues and be in sync with the changing requirements of the industry, and uncover training needs. Sharma believed that the training programs were quite contemporary and the quality was better than the industry average. But despite this, Sharma was left with the feeling that the organization was not getting the best results out of the training programs.

During his field visits with some of the SRs he had trained, Sharma observed that the SRs were not practicing what they were taught in the classroom. One of the SRs who had done very well in the training program explained, “The training was very informative and I learnt a lot from the program. However, real world situation require us to adapt our knowledge according to the situation. My boss told me that we have to be more practical in our dealings with the customers.”

Sharma was aware that most line managers had this attitude. He knew how important line managers were for reinforcing initial training, but it was often these people who could also unknowingly do a lot of harm. It was not uncommon for a line manager to comment, “Congratulation! You have done exceptionally well in the training program. Now, let me show you how things are done in the real world.” Comments like this could prevent the trainees from obtaining the optimal benefits from the training program. Sharma made a mental note to discuss the issue with Shah.

“I get your point. Such things happen in every organization. But, you have to find out the best way to solve your problem,” said Shah.

Sharma had come prepared for the meeting. For the last six months, he had been working on a project to prepare some training modules for the line managers. The

course was on coaching skills for line managers. Sharma contended that though coaching was a vital part of a line manager's responsibility, many of them didn't actually know how to do it. He argued that if a formal coaching system was put in place, the line managers could reinforce the classroom training; this would lead to the overall development of the sales force. After Sharma's presentation of the detailed training proposal, Shah said, "I am impressed. But to tell you the truth, we won't be able to implement such a program for another one or two years. We have to really ramp up our presence in the market and I can't afford to bring the managers out of the market for a training program at this juncture. Moreover, we are in the process of cutting costs to meet the profit budget, as we are struggling to meet the revenue budget. We have to wait till things get better before we can do this."

"But all our expenditure on training is being wasted, without the support of the line manager. What do you suggest we do about that in the mean time?" Sharma asked.

Shah retorted, "Well, you are the training manager. You have to make the most of the resources you have. Speak to the line managers, persuade them to see things your way."

"Don't you think they should be the ones to approach me with their problems?" asked Sharma.

Shah replied, "If they are not doing so, you should give them a reason to approach you. Just because you are a training manager does not mean that they will approach you. They have to see that you are a useful resource for them. They have to see results."

"We are not getting the optimum results out of our training programs due to the non-involvement of the managers. You are saying they have to see results before getting involved...it's a chicken-and-egg story...let us initiate something from our side...this training program could be the first step," said Sharma.

Shah replied, "You can forget about this training program for the time being...If you

ask me, the answer would be to conduct fewer training programs and focus more on ensuring that the programs are effective in increasing the sales...and believe me, there will be fewer training programs now, as the training budget is going to be cut.”

Sharma was very disappointed. He said, “Sir, I understand we are going through a lean phase. But, don’t you think there is a greater need for training in such a situation?”

“I will be happy to allocate you the money. Show me some results. I should know what is the ROI from training,” said Shah. Sharma could detect a hint of sarcasm in Shah’s words. Both the men knew how hard it was to ascertain the ROI from training.

The discussion went on for a few more minutes, but no amount of persuasion could change Shah’s position.

From the time he joined Dirc2U, Sharma had dreamed of putting a training organization in place about five years, with a team of at least three more training managers. The meeting with Shah had made him realize that the very credibility of the training function in the company was at stake now. With his job on the line, Sharma, personally, had even more at stake.

Sharma now had to figure out how to get the line managers more involved in sales training. He also had to work towards earning more credibility for the training function in the eyes of the various stakeholders.

Sharma understood that getting the involvement of the line managers was easier said than done. There were many conflicts of interest. He recalled that the line managers had not been very responsive to the overtures made by him on earlier occasions. Many did not feel that training was helpful to them. He had even heard some line managers complaining about how man-days were lost due to training. They felt that their team members were better off in the field doing some work rather than attending a training program on a “vacation paid for by the company.”

Some managers even felt that a person who was not born with the skills to be a salesman could not be trained to become one. Line managers were also heard saying that on-the-job training (OJT) was the best form of training a person can get. In fact, during the lunch break at an earlier training program, a newly appointed AM had told Sharma, “My take on training is ‘push them off the cliff, and they will learn how to fly’. I feel that classroom training is a waste of time and money...on-the-job training is sufficient.”

Sharma wouldn't have had any issue with such an attitude if the line managers were indeed concerned about training their team members. In his earlier company, he had trained many SRs in the field as he perceived that the quality of formal classroom training was poor. But often, OJT was merely teaching the SRs some thumb rules and shortcuts that did more harm than good in the long run.

To make his case that training was useful, Sharma began by collecting the pre-training and post-training sales data of the SRs. Although he had to follow up a number of times with some RMs before he received the data, once the data was tabulated and analyzed, Sharma felt that the effort had been well worth it.

On analyzing the pre-training sales figures and comparing them with sales figures after three months and six months of training, some patterns began to appear. Sharma found that in most cases individuals or teams who had received training along with their first line managers were more likely to have performed better than those individuals or teams whose managers did not attend the training program. He also found that SRs whose managers were more enthusiastic about training were doing better than SRs whose managers were skeptical. He also found that some of the teams who were doing exceptionally well had line managers who were true champions of training. They used to consult him regarding sales training-related quite regularly. They were also the ones who regularly provided feedback and suggestions to him on how to make the training program more effective. The problem was that such managers were few and according to Sharma this was, in part, responsible for the poor sales performance of the company.

Though this information was significant, Sharma knew that it would not be enough

to convince Shah. He had very little data to support the conclusion he had reached and Shah would probably dismiss his findings as flawed. It was difficult to attribute the sales to training alone, as there are so many other factors that impacted sales. Moreover, he felt that it would be too early to go back to Shah. He decided to do some further groundwork before approaching the CEO. He decided to go with these findings to the national sales manager (NSM), Sanjeev Rao (Rao), instead.

Rao had been heading the sales function at Dirc2U ever since the inception of the company five years ago. Though he was not a big champion of training, Rao understood the importance of training.

After going through the report, Rao said, “Very interesting...Managers do have a role in helping reinforce classroom training. So, how can I help you?”

“I wish we had greater involvement of the line managers in sales training,” said Sharma.

Rao said, “If the line managers feel that their objectives are in alignment with your objectives, they will definitely work with you. Why don’t you talk to them, and show them this report?”

“I will do that right away. But I also expect you to speak up for this initiative with your team,” said Sharma.

“You can count on me.”

It was six months since Sharma had that interaction with Rao. In addition to setting up open lines of communication with the RMs and AMs, Sharma, had also started involving them in designing the training programs. Trainees came to programs with an assessment of their strengths, weaknesses, etc., from the line managers; after training they went to the field with assessment of the training manager and individual development plans to be followed up by line managers. That Rao championed the cause also helped attain this breakthrough. Now, more line

managers have started approaching Sharma with their problems or suggestions.

“They (the line managers) are so involved because you have involved them in training process. Most of all, as they have understood that your objectives are no different from their objectives and that training helps them in achieving their objectives. Some line managers have witnessed a positive change in their sales figures that they attribute to training. The stature of training has grown in the eyes of the line managers,” said Rao.

“Thanks to you. Do you think we can take this partnership to the next level with a formal training program on coaching skills for the line managers?” asked Sharma.

“Suits me,” Rao replied.

During the period, Sharma had also accumulated data to project the direct (such as new skills learnt), indirect (such as before and after analyses of improvement in closing sales calls) and long-term benefits of training (such as improved customer relationship). He felt that this data would be helpful in linking training to the bottomline results. He had also started networking with other T&D professionals in the industry. Insights gained from such networking helped him forge better partnerships with the sales force as well as explore ways to project the benefits of training to the top management. With more line managers approaching him with their problems, it had become necessary for him to continuously upgrade his knowledge.

Sharma believed that after another three months he would be in a position to put forward a strong case for a training program for managers in front of Shah.

Questions

- 1. Discuss the importance of line managers in reinforcing initial classroom**

training. What are the issues and challenges faced by training managers in partnering with the line managers? How can these be overcome? In your opinion, how did Sharma succeed in forging a partnership with the line managers?

- 2. Training is viewed as a cost. Although experts opine that training is needed the most when a company is going through tough times, it is in such situations that training budgets are most likely to be slashed. What are the problems in ascertaining the ROI of training? How can training link training to bottom-line results?**

Details

1. Case study solved answers

2. pdf/word

3. Fully Solved with answers