

LESSONS LEARNED | BY GERSON ROSENBLUM

# Get on the Training Train

In my last column, I discussed the importance of knowing when it's time to terminate underperforming employees. How could I write an article on firing employees before discussing proper training techniques? Indeed, fairness dictates that employees receive the tools needed to do a job well.

However, I submit that training without a bona fide commitment to company excellence is time wasted. How many people have you trained that didn't work out? That's because you were concerned with training them, but they were concerned with collecting a paycheck.

So, the first module in your training needs to lay out how serious your company is about excellence. Before the new hire starts snoozing, give specific, anonymous examples of people who've been with your company the longest and those who never made it through the probationary period. Paint a vivid picture of working at your company as a career, not just a stopping point on the road to a record deal.

Be sure your new hire understands that working for your company is a privilege — one that will be withdrawn if he or she doesn't measure up. If you scare the new hire into departing before the end of orientation, you've saved yourself the time and expense of a poor hiring decision.

When it comes to the nuts and bolts of a training program, no two companies operate exactly the same way. Rightfully, every company should have its own distinctive flavor. That said, here are a couple of rules that I believe are universal and often overlooked.

**Rule 1: Don't fake it.** It astounds me how often I hear retail sales associates give out bogus information. If your employee can't answer a question, he or she must apologize to the

customer, promise to get an accurate answer and do it.

Being forthright will endear the associate to the customer and will save the company's reputation. In training, drive home the point that knowingly lying to a customer is grounds for dismissal.

**Rule 2: It's not a history class.** Don't get caught up in teaching company history. It's a nice touch and valuable in moderation, but spending too much time on it can be an ego trip and a signal that you're more concerned with your past than your present and future. Get the new hire to the point of feeling pride, and move on.

### Rule 3: Maintain balance.

It's important to balance theoretical and practical information in training. Forcing a new hire to read the "Magna Carta" will create a person who studies for the test and forgets everything later. It's the company's responsibility to balance theoretical and legal procedures with hands-on activities, job shadowing and some fun.

### Rule 4: Use technology.

In this age of cheap video cameras, movie editing software and YouTube, it's so easy to put together entertaining training tools. They don't have to be world-class to be effective, and creating one training video will ensure consistent training for future hires.

### Rule 5: Training is ongoing.

An important factor to remember about training is that it never ends. During my retail career, I required a 15-minute staff meeting before opening *every* day. By the end of each week, the staff was exposed to a healthy dose of announcements, new product introductions, sales training and team building.

And since the meeting started before store hours, my team was in place and ready to go in time for opening. Imagine that! **MI**

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