

## The Answer to the Universe: Google's Top Training & Development Techniques

Posted by Alia Poonawala, June 24, 2014

42, the answer to life, the universe, and everything. Or so Douglas Adams wrote in "A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Universe." That may have been true in 1979 when the book was written, but we all know that these days, the true answer to the Universe is probably being developed somewhere at Google.

In 2010, US Businesses spent \$171 Billion on training and development (ASTD). So when we discovered some of Google's talent management tips and research, we went mad with delight! Here are 4 amazing things we learned from various interviews with Google's leadership:

### #1. Cut it Out!

In 2011, Google offered more courses to their employees than had ever been done previously. They removed the classes that were no longer working and revamped the others.

Karen May, VP of People Development at Google was quoted in the Wall Street Journal, when speaking about their overhaul of the program: "What's important is that it aligns with our overall business strategy."

So in this case, if you have a training effort in place and it's not quite clear what the results are in terms of numbers, or if the results aren't clear, tangible, and positive, time to let it go.

### #2. Hit the Nail on the Head:

Professor David Bradford, Director of the Executive Program in leadership at Stanford University noted that employees often take a class and then, return to their jobs with the same old habits.

Google has managed to find a way to help employees utilize their training in their work by being very precise about when it offers classes and to whom. They use performance feedback surveys to create coursework recommendations at the end of every semester. They also are careful to provide coursework based specifically on department (Software Engineering vs. HR) and stage in career development (entry level vs. mid-level)

This is highly recommended by John Baldoni, a leadership author and expert: "The more targeted it is, the better, because it is specific and actionable... the downside of leadership development is that it is too often amorphous and doesn't speak to people in the language that they need at a specific time."

### #3. Connect:

In 2011, Google conducted a massive study internally to determine what were the 8 most highly valued attributes of the best Google managers.

"What employees valued most were even-keeled bosses who made time for one-on-one meetings, who helped people puzzle through problems by asking questions, not dictating answers, and who took an interest in employees' lives and careers."

By using hard data, Google was able to take 10,000 observations about managers across 100 variables and then create a list with actual substance. They then used this list (See **Google's Rules**) to instruct in training programs and individual coaching sessions with employees. They found dramatic improvements in about 75% of their lowest-performing managers. Now, that's something!

### #4. Work With What You've Got:

Google utilizes their very own employees to give training and teach workshops. By giving them responsibility, learning becomes instilled in the company culture rather than something that is forced upon them. Google found that "employees whose managers took a course about having better career conversations, for instance, reported that those conversations improved--whether their instructor was a full-time course facilitator or a volunteer from another department of the company."

Karen May, Google's VP of People Development stresses: "Put the support structures in place to make it happen and then get out of the way." (Fast Company)

So there you have it! 4 highly useful pieces of advice from Google themselves. How are you going to take these principles and incorporate them into your own training efforts?

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