

# Training Budget Cut Again?

Author, Ivy Meadors

The first two things that get cut with a tight economy and reduced budgets are training and travel. But the one thing that can have the greatest negative impact on our companies is not training people. Not only do we need to keep up their skills but we also need to provide incentives to remain in a job. Statistics consistently reveal that one of the top five reasons people select a job or employer is because of the opportunity to learn.

Technology continues to change and no matter how tight we need to get on the training budgets things are going to keep on changing. We need to ensure that our companies are keeping the competitive edge or the competition is going to barrel right over us.

There are many creative things that you, the manager in your firm, can do to continue to provide training opportunities at little to no cost. Your people will appreciate it and so will your customers. Prevent the competition from gaining any advantage by implementing these training methods in your company.

## **Job swapping**

Have you ever considered swapping your staff with someone in another company for a short period of time? It is an invaluable means to get training and take little to no hit on the budget. There is minimal impact to productivity also. You send someone to work at a firm in your local area where they can benefit from learning a new skill, make new acquaintances and learn another culture in return they offer you one of their staff that has a skill in a particular area that you are lacking. I have tried this and it works great. And don't worry about losing your staff to the other company. If they are right for your team and know you care, you shouldn't have anything to work about. On the other hand you could also use the strategy to only send the ones you want to get rid of to your competition – just kidding.

## **Networking opportunities**

You don't have to know the secret handshake to get in, but professional associations will place you in an exclusive group of career-minded workers. They can help you network with other pros in your field. You can hear speakers on topics of interest who teach the newest trends in your field. Most user groups are non-profit and offer low to no member fees to join. The majority of these investments are tax deductible too. There are also user groups specific to products and services that you can usually attend for no charge at all. Unfortunately, we do not utilize these valuable resources nearly as much as we should. As a manager it is beneficial for you to tell your staff about these opportunities and to provide them the time to attend.

## **Conferences**

Conferences and expos are going to take a small investment since travel may be necessary but they can provide a wealth of knowledge to your staff. Did you also know that you can get free or significantly reduced passes to attend these events? Most conferences have made deals with the vendor sponsors who are given a certain number of free passes to offer to their customers. There are also groups of hotel rooms that have been blocked off at reduced rates for the attendees. If you don't ask about them, you may never hear of these offerings.

So get in good with one of your service or product providers to find out what they can offer you. If this is not an option, contact the conference provider and ask what is the best discount available and explain that the only way you can attend is if the price is reduced. Many will do what they can to accommodate or at least give you the lowest rate available.

We do ***whatever it takes*** to help people attend our conferences. **If you are having trouble getting funding to attend one of our events, please call us and we will work with you to find a way to make it possible to come.**

Here are a few travel sources that you may find useful to get reduced rates for events:

<http://www.mypoints.com>

<http://www.freetraveltips.com/>

<http://air.onetravel.com/>

<http://www.expedia.com>

<http://www.travelocity.com>

### **Online webinars**

This is a good option when you have limited time available. A webinar is usually 1-3 hours in length and can be taken from your desktop via the Internet. The good news is that most of these are free to low cost. For those that might cost \$95-\$295 for a session, you put the show up on the wall with an overhead projector then have multiple people to attend for the price. And no one has to leave the building. Just be sure the company providing the webinars does not have any restrictions on the total attendees for the price.

I hope you try some of these techniques. If you have implemented other techniques that have worked well for you, I would love to hear from you. And if any of these ideas or resources is useful to you, please let me know. I would love to hear from you and know what you think of this column.

Ivy Meadors is the CEO of High Tech *High Touch* Solutions, Inc.™ a full service Help Desk and Contact Center consulting firm and the producer of the conferences, ***The Help Desk Professionals Conference and Expo*** and ***The Government Customer Support Conference and Expo***. The corporation is based out of Seattle, Washington. She is an acclaimed leader in the service and support industry worldwide both as a consultant and a professional speaker.

As an experienced keynote speaker and seminar leader, Ivy is recognized internationally for her thought provoking, motivational and informative presentations. Ivy's highly interactive presentations are rich with content and alive with humor and real-life examples. She holds the credentials of a professional speaker as recognized by the National Speakers Association, of which she is an active member.

You can subscribe to her internationally read ezine, *eSharings* at her website. She can be reached at [solutions4u@hthts.com](mailto:solutions4u@hthts.com) and loves to hear from her readers. Please visit our websites at [www.hthts.com](http://www.hthts.com) and [www.ivymeadors.com](http://www.ivymeadors.com).