

## **Train in Tough Times**

### **Abstract**

In any economic downturn, it can be easy to postpone training programs—or even cut training altogether. Visionary leaders, however, realize that training should not be an expendable line budget item. Great companies realize the value of their staffs, and tend to focus—even more—on staff development in tough economic times. Trained employees will be more confident, productive and resilient.

### **The Reality**

It's safe to say that in tough times management's attention turns to cost cutting. And the first two line budget items often slashed are—travel and entertainment (T&E) and training. As conditions grow progressively worse, focus shifts to staff reductions. And layoffs result, in an erosion of core competencies and capabilities. Value propositions are often compromised as well.

For many organizations bookings drop off, and the sales cycle is stretched, since more and more customers are slow to pull the trigger. This vicious cycle perpetuates—capacity is freed up, and service transactions begin to dwindle, often freeing up staff. This is the ideal time to invest in your people, and to build needed competencies.

### **Staff Development**

Your frontline staff is your defense to survive in tough times. And building leadership capability only strengthens your competitive position. So, a good place to start might be Customer Service, or Sales Management training—anything to make your firm even more customer-centric. After all, you have to earn your customer's business every day.

Slogans like “the customer is king,” or “the sun rises and sets with the customer” must be more than exhortations. To be more customer-centric demands that you measure the voice of the customer. Remember there is a big difference between a satisfied customer and a loyal customer. Make a mistake or two, and your satisfied customer will likely defect to your competitor.

With the economy struggling, this is often a good time to focus on your sales staff, as well. For example, Sales Management training will help to build a unified sales team—focused on customer needs and expectations. Indeed, your sales representatives need to become business partners to your customers. It's all about value creation and building loyal customers—one customer at a time.

Other Human Performance Improvement (HPI) training programs might include: Supervisory Skills, Improving Communication, Time Management, Team Building, Diversity

Training and Conflict Management. Among the more popular Process Performance Improvement (PPI) training programs are: Lean Manufacturing, Continual Improvement, Problem Solving, and Statistical Process Control.

### **A Multitude of Funding Programs are Available to U.S. Companies**

When cash flow becomes a concern, and making payroll an even bigger concern, where does your training investment come from? There is a silver lining to these dark and menacing clouds. State and federal funding assistance programs—from partial reimbursement to outright grants—are available to help companies subsidize training costs.

Funding assistance programs are designed to cover everything from maintaining high employment in local areas, to helping American companies combat foreign competition. Some state programs are even designed to counter out-of-state challenges by domestic competitors. Most programs offer financial assistance to upgrade employee skills, and operating efficiency through training.

### **Path Forward**

So, as the economy weakens, shift focus to your value proposition, your customers, and put your people first. Even if cost cutting measures are inevitable—think twice before you cut training and staff development—after all you don't want to weaken your first line of defense. This is the time to acquire needed core competencies and to fortify your in-house training programs.

### **About the Author**



Stanley Cherkasky is the Managing Partner of Change Management Consulting, Inc. Founder of the firm, Stan is the principal architect of the *Performance Improvement Breakthrough*<sup>™</sup> methodology, and the *Six Sigma Lean Advantage*<sup>™</sup>—innovative and proven strategies that accelerate ROI and net income improvement, build customer loyalty, and create world-class recognition.

Stan has more than three decades of business and consulting experience, in both the private and public sectors, in the United States and abroad. Stan specializes in building high-performance teams, and working closely with senior leaders to achieve breakthrough financial, organizational, and operating improvement. He has been quoted in many business publications, including Fortune, Business Week and the Wall Street Journal.

### **About Change Management Consulting, Inc. (CMC)**

Founded in 1993, Change Management Consulting is a global management consulting and training company, dedicated to helping organizations of all sizes improve performance,

achieve goals and advance leadership capability. As a full-service organizational improvement firm, CMC focuses on organizational and leadership development, compliance management (ISO 9001 and its derivatives), strategic planning and Lean Six Sigma initiatives.

Headquartered in Wayne, NJ with offices in San Diego, Dallas and Detroit, CMC has a proven track record in helping public and private sector clients implement pragmatic continual improvement initiatives that drive financially measurable results. CMC also has extensive experience in obtaining grants and funding assistance for its clients. Learn more at [www.cmc-changemanagement.com](http://www.cmc-changemanagement.com) or contact CMC at (877) 268-2440 or (973) 696-7878.