

Send Your Employees Back To School To Remain Competitive



Today's labour market changes rapidly. Jobs, skills and qualifications that were in demand 5 years ago can disappear in the blink of an eye. This not only has devastating effects on the employees whose skills and qualifications are no longer up-to-date but it also impacts business and the economy on many levels.

When one employee falters or leaves and another is brought in time is lost, additional resources are consumed to train and get the next employee up-to-date and a loss of historical knowledge and perspective that goes with the departing employee. Letting go of employees whose skills are out of date can have a ripple effect throughout the organization creating unease that impacts productivity and employee engagement. Yet keeping employees whose skills are no longer cutting edge also costs the organization in lost productivity and opportunities to remain competitive.

As much as an individual employee has the responsibility to ensure his/her skills and knowledge are relevant the organization also has a stake and plays a role in helping employees remain current. Organizations who show their employees they care about employee career development often report higher employee motivation, engagement and productivity. It pays to support your employee's skills development on many levels.

More Education For More People More of the Time

Many career fields require members to regularly attend training and education to maintain their status as a licensed or qualified professional. However, for many people once education and training is attained and an individual has a job further education takes a backseat to getting the job done in the moment. It can be a tragedy when a hard working employee remains focussed on the task in front of him or her, to meet the demands of a job, but loses sight of what may be coming next.

In today's economy more jobs require more continued education and training. As an organization it can be vital to have a workforce with access to the latest skills and knowledge. Actively encouraging your workforce to pursue training and education is vital to remain agile and competitive. In Canada we have seen the controversy around hiring foreign workers to fill jobs where Canadians lack skills (or interest). In response the Canadian government has created their Express Entry program that allows individuals in certain fields with specific skills to have an 'express' entry to Canada. While that may be a great idea to help support the economy and fill jobs, Canadian organizations can also create their own skilled workforce by looking within and helping their current employees transition to future jobs through educational support.

Training and development are vital components of not only a strong organization but also the well being of their employees. Opportunities to learn and grow can foster positive attitudes in employees. When possible an organization should consider the value encouraging employees to obtain further education and training.

6 Ways You Can Support Employee Education

- 1) ***Provide career development path coaching:*** Employees care when their employers care. Frequently when asked what they want from an organization many employees cite career growth. Often they do not have the knowledge or resources to see the clear path to this growth. Providing employees with career direction assistance either in house or from a third party Career Coach can be an excellent way to identify what education and training is important for the long term viability of the employee and the organization.
- 2) ***Provide tuition reimbursement:*** Education is costly; It drains for ones energy and ones financial resources. Helping to support employees who need or who want further education and training can build employee loyalty as it is also updating skill and knowledge.
- 3) ***Cover professional membership dues:*** Encourage your employees to become members of their professional associations where they can gain access to additional training and information and stay on top of the latest developments in their field.
- 4) ***Offer sabbaticals:*** For employees with a longstanding history at your organization offer the opportunity for a sabbatical of 3, 6 or 12 months to obtain further education or training. You do not need to continue to pay their salary during this time (although a few organizations do). However you may provide the employee with an opportunity to continue receiving benefits and accruing seniority and, of course, offer to hold their job for their return.
- 5) ***Flexible jobs:*** Flexible jobs are a popular topic on many levels, often designed to meet the personal needs of an employee. But flexible jobs that allow an employee to return to school part-time to obtain further education can benefit both employee and organization. More and more education can be picked up through a flexible program of online study such as MOOCs (massive open online courses). Some of these programs are offered free or for little cost.
- 6) ***In house educational support:*** With this increase in and access to online education training and education can be found on your doorstep. But not all employees can flourish in an online or MOOC setting. If you have other

employees with additional training or more current education providing an opportunity for employees to receive in-house tutoring or support (under clearly designed guidelines) can do wonders for both skills development and community building. You can implement weekly tutoring or 'classroom' sharing sessions on certain topics regardless of whether your employees are enrolled in external training.

To remain competitive and productive an organization will need a highly trained, educated and motivated workforce. Helping your employees stay educated and feel supported can contribute to the ultimate success of your organization.