



ADVISORY

THE LEARNING CULTURE

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Sales

Imagine your principal supplier tells you they will cease all R&D for the next five years and sell only what they currently offer. You'd probably think you will seek another more progressive line to represent. Why? Because companies that stop evolving evaporate over time. I often pose this scenario to salespeople in seminars to challenge them to continue to invest in their personal R&D.

The learning culture describes a business environment that promotes employee growth and development. This culture treats knowledge as a valuable and leveragable commodity. They treat it as something more than a hidden asset. The development of human capital is a natural evolution. Humans are hard-wired to evolve and emerge — it's our destiny to grow. Not growing is what's unnatural. So when a company fails to offer these opportunities for their employees to learn, they are handicapping themselves by under utilizing the talent available to them. There is no commodity in creativity.

A business owner approached me during a seminar break and said, "We used to be the leader in our market until we lost our best people. Now, we're just like everyone else." As STAFDA members continue to look for ways to stand out in their markets, I urge you to tap into the hidden potential of your people. Create a culture that encourages your employees to fully develop the raw material they brought to the job. Each of us is encoded for greatness in something. Are you providing the opportunity for your employees to show that greatness?

Training and development is one of the most effective things companies can do to create a motivational environment for employees. Learning is intrinsically satisfying.

Tom Reilly is an internationally recognized motivational speaker and author of Value-Added Selling. He also wrote STAFDA's Sales Pro handbook, pens this quarterly Sales Advisory, and offers members 30 free minutes of phone time per year to answer questions about sales and sales management issues. He is also available for on-site training. As a consultant and trainer, he focuses on helping distributors, manufacturers, and reps grow their sales and their people. Contact Tom at Tom Reilly Training, 171 Chesterfield Industrial Blvd., Chesterfield, MO 63005, phone: 636/537-3360, fax: 636/532-9764, e-mail: tom@tomreillytraining.com, or visit www.tomreillytraining.com. Be sure to let him know you are a STAFDA member.

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OVER

It offers hope and information to execute one's job more effectively. On a practical level, training helps your company tap into the hidden assets of your company. The opposite of this — failing to learn and grow — is being stuck in a rut, a corporate comfort zone.

Sending your employees to school, offering formal training sessions, and conducting brown bag workshops over lunch are a few examples of how companies develop their human capital. Over the years, I've seen a number of examples of what companies do to foster employee growth and development. One company made learning cultural for all employees and went on to become the largest chain of business journals in the U.S. They held weekly meetings that always included a learning element. It started with advertising salespeople, then subscription salespeople, then editorial, and finally administrative. Everyone trained on something, not just on revenue generation.

STAFDA members have the opportunity to create this type of culture. Many compete with large companies that have large training budgets. Training and developing employees levels the playing field for STAFDA members. Creating a learning culture doesn't require a large staff or big budget. It can include mentoring programs where you use experienced employees to mentor younger ones. Holding weekly sales and staff meetings that include product training or personal development unleashes the talent in your ranks.

The most important thing you can do as a company leader is to set the tone for development. Be a learning example for your employees. Use all of the resources that STAFDA provides. Tap into your principals for their training resources. Make learning new things a regular part of company meetings. Encourage your employees to go back to school and support them financially in this. Offer incentives to those who take you up on your offer. Let them know their knowledge and experience are two of your most leveragable assets. Then, you will have created a learning culture.