

SALES

CRITICAL RESULT AREAS	KEY TASKS / FUNCTIONS	AVAILABLE TOOLS
24 MONTHLY AGING GROUP	Customer chg	Order form
	Scheduling	Rental contract
	Staging	Daily list
	Delivery	Product manual
	Installation	Message board
	Service Reports	Delivery report
	Mgr. follow-up	

120 DELIVERIES PER MONTH	Product Knowledge	Adv. Samples
	Dist. Agreement	Product manual
	Rate definition	Display checklist
	Phase Protocol	Daily list
	Order completion	Order form
	Staging	



Training

The Big Chief Way

All it takes is the right knowledge, something to write on and tools that you already have

For nearly a century, America's children trudged off to school each day carrying little more than a dog-eared Big Chief tablet and a No. 2 pencil. Once there, they actually learned things like spelling and writing and math, and what made our country the most admired engine of freedom and enterprise on earth. There were no laptops, no mixed media. Just kids with pencils and paper and a teacher with a clear mission. And they lifted us to the moon. Along the way they created computers and the Internet (with a little help from Al Gore), wiped out disease and liberated millions of people from hunger and oppression. Your aim may be less ambitious, to be sure, but change "kids" to "employees," "teacher" to "trainer" and gaining that 2 percent in new customers every month begins the same way—and leads to the same degree of success. The basic tenet: keep all learning simple, keep it focused and base it on real-life materials and examples infused with a healthy dose of common values. And always check the homework.

Remember that the only use for training is to improve business results. (If you can think of another, please write it in pencil on the back of a \$50 bill and mail it to me; I promise to give you all the credit for your discovery.) It doesn't have to be complex, expensive or formal. The right start to developing an effective training solution is identifying exactly what you want. That may seem easy, but so does the national anthem until you start to sing it. Repeat: the key is *simplicity*. If you need a monthly increase in new accounts of 2 percent or more, say that—don't embroider with fancy corporate-speak such as, "Improve sales and customer satisfaction so as to grow the company in a way that provides maximum ongoing benefit to owners, stakeholders and blah, blah, blah..." Explain what you want in terms that even new hires can understand and that foster accurate measurement later. If bad account charge-offs are to be 1 percent or less of the accounts you began the month with, say *just that* instead of relying on weasel words such as "maintain acceptable charge-offs." After you have defined the improvements expected and determined how they will be measured, you are ready to go on to the fun of actually making all this happen.

First, find your Big Chief tablet and a No. 2 pencil. Or—because they stopped manufacturing Big Chief tablets years ago—grab the nearest yellow legal pad and a pen. Headline one page "Sales," another "Account Service" and a third "Admin." Make four columns on each page. In the first, list each of the result areas critical to future success. To the right of each, in the second column, enter the key functions or tasks that—when properly accomplished—ensure the right outcome. The third column is reserved for the tools and resources required to deliver the proper training in that area. Leave the fourth column blank; we'll get to that later.

You now have a training menu. On the left is what you want, in the middle are the daily tasks or functions involved in giving that to you and on the right are the tools your people will need. If you don't know the operations side well enough to fill your Big Chief tablet, someone else should be in charge of training. This is true

whether you are the director of training or regional manager of things that need managing. When content misses the mark and audiences grow restless, the perceived value of all future training in your company plummets to somewhere just below zero. The chart below is an example of what one Big Chief Training Program might include:

CRITICAL RESULT AREAS	KEY TASKS FUNCTIONS	AVAILABLE TOOLS	
2 Percent Monthly Account Growth	Contract Close Scheduling/Staging Delivery/Installation Service Response Manager Follow-Up	Order Form Rental Contracts Daily List Product Manuals Message Board Delivery Reports	
100 Deliveries Per Month	Product Knowledge Deal Awareness Role Definition Phone Protocol Order Completion Staging	Advertising Samples Product Manuals Display Checklist Daily List Order Form	

Focus on the needs, teach the tasks and provide the tools. Notice that the first "Result Area" lists 2 percent monthly account growth as a desired result. But nowhere in column two does the word "Sales" appear. This is why it's important that the people designing your training have an insightful and deep understanding of the things that drive our business. Such a person will know that growth is the result of consistent merchandising—often to a customer base that has few alternatives and strong immediate need (Wow! Now *there's* a tough sell!)—followed by flawless execution of agreement closes and deliveries, plus unbroken follow-up by a local manager. When employees are trained and coached to keep well-groomed merchandise on rent by maintaining a base of confident, satisfied and on-time payers, even a small number of deliveries can produce decent growth—and require less inventory investment. When those things are *not* in place, few managers can "out-deliver" the store's returns and payouts. Just one person armed with knowledge and determination can generate enough deliveries to satisfy growth needs if everything else is in place. Getting a completed order is a task. Tasks can be accomplished singularly and at will. But growth is a process that requires concerted and concentrated effort by a team of trained professionals working with adequate resources and leadership, shaping and guiding myriad moving

and interlocking parts with but one end in mind. Does that sound anything like your operation?

All the research suggests that adult learners learn best when the subject matter has strong relevance to their daily work and their perceived place in the organization. So everything on your chart should be found in your store. Training with the everyday tools that people will work with later ensures the higher comfort level that leads to more rapid grasp and better outcomes. Rapid transfer of information from teacher to learner is critical in that the time allocated to training is usually limited. The faster your people can grasp the meaning of each document, form and screen, the quicker they can apply their new competencies. How better to understand the proper use of store marketing aids quickly than by using the actual pieces in training?

Trainers love to write. Big, complex blocks of copy dressed up with footnotes, charts and quartile samplings all in a nice mixed-media presentation strum the strings of a trainer's heart. Then the learners go back to work and all is forgotten. Nothing they touch, read, see or handle looks much like the things they dealt with in the training sessions. The games they played there seem to have no relevance to the questions customers are asking or to the situations they face. Well, let's just write some more training to fix that. And so on.

Training has become a huge industry—but what has it done for your business lately? Owners and executives often become frustrated and simply give up trying to find training that is both effective and affordable. Meanwhile other companies spend huge amounts on the New Big Thing that will take their currently great organization to *Greaterness* (look it up). There is one thing that training seldom is: reliable. Rare is the boss who devotes precious payroll time to regularly scheduled training activities. That is because usually we train with the wrong things, at the wrong time and—in many cases—we train the wrong people. So we only train when forced to, or when nothing else seems to work.

Anyone on the payroll for longer than six months needs and deserves training that's different than the instructional training administered to new hires. Their universes are not yet parallel. There are no shared experiences and their understandings are vastly different. So why do we believe that sticking both in the same class will promote acceptable outcomes? Deep down, we probably don't believe it at all. But the sheer economies of having all those people learning in one place at the same time overrides any convictions we may have about the real purpose and processes of training.

Most experienced workers know the *hows* and *whats*, but many have difficulty getting the blocks in the right or-

der or persuading others that these are, indeed, the right blocks. Training for them should be all about values, goals, directions, interpersonal issues. But because details, forms and repetitive tasks are cheaper and easier to teach—and are certainly less controversial and easier to sell to the higher-ups than are concepts, values and ideas—we tend to focus on detail. Imagine that Sherman already knows how things work in your store. He can complete any task after eventually figuring out what's expected. What confounds Sherman are the other things. He doesn't read people easily, he exhibits poor body language, he cannot prioritize

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and often ends up just doing things himself because it's easier. Coworkers say Sherman frequently loses his cool when customers don't do what he expects or wants them to do. So how can Sherman and the kid hired last month benefit equally from the same training class? They cannot.

About that fourth column on our Big Chief chart. Label it "Roadblocks." Those are the things that get in the way of good work as it relates to each topic, task, function or resource. Poll every manager and associate and maybe even some customers. List all of the things that often get in the way of successful execution of store processes. Later, when district managers visit stores, they take out the charts and focus on Roadblocks. Each is either crossed off as resolved or highlighted for more attention. This simple method requires no complicated reporting or analysis and provides instant feedback. Sometimes it's not what you start, but what you stop, that proves most valuable.

If the Big Chief Training Program sounds way too simple, just think about how great most of those kids from yesterday turned out—kids like Wally and the Beav. And keep your fingers crossed that Eddie Haskell isn't up there in your training department, planning new adventures for you and your customers. ✧

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