



Invest in Training

Effective training encourages employees to take responsibility for their careers.

BY MICHELLE BANGERT, ASSISTANT EDITOR

Steve Zinkgraf had just closed a deal with Sony to provide its first major executive and champion training sessions. Then Sony called, asking for the slides and instructor notes so they could do the course themselves. “I didn’t send them,” says Zinkgraf, president and CEO of Sigma Breakthrough Technologies Inc. (SBTI, San Marcos, TX), who says those types of training programs often fail. “I think people

respond to trainers who have been there and done that before.”

Whether it is training for safety or Six Sigma, trainers believe there is a right and wrong way to do it. Ideally, training should be goal-based, tied to improving performance and led by a dynamic instructor.

Effective training programs often start with a good teacher—a content area expert who has had specific training to

do the job, and is accountable for results. When hiring trainers at SBTI, Zinkgraf says his first concern is if the person can go in front of a classroom and hold the trainees’ attention for five days.

SBTI has an apprentice program for trainers to learn advanced tools and techniques, as well as a two-day Shakespearean leadership course. “The engineers ask, ‘Is this real? Are we being punished?’” says Zinkgraf, who devel-

QUALITY TECH TIPS

► Prior to training, the instructor must consider the students’ skills, bring them to a common level and go from there.

► In order to get results with training programs, companies should have a clear expectation of changes, how training will be measured and how it will affect the company.

► Employers should invest at least 3% of payroll, whenever possible, to provide training opportunities for their current employees.

◀ **Forrest Breyfogle works with Rebecca Earp, owner of Earp Distribution, a student in the Lean Six Sigma Black Belt course at Smarter Solutions. Source: Smarter Solutions Inc.**

oped the course with Shakespeare & Co. (Lenox, MA), but adds that engineers are generally won over by the end. "Training is essentially performing," Zinkgraf says. "What we're looking for are good performers."

Roderick Munro, *Quality Magazine's* 2006 Professional of the Year, and president of Ram Q Universe (Reno, NV), says there is more to a good trainer than being a good speaker, and companies may sometimes inadvertently sabotage training programs by training one person who then trains the others. This individual may not necessarily be a good teacher, therefore training may not be effective.

Prior to training, the instructor must consider the students' skills, bring them to a common level and go from there, Munro says. This approach takes time, as having nine quality coordinators would require nine tailored classes, but the more time spent planning up front, the easier it is to learn, Munro says. Otherwise, group sessions may make it difficult to meet everyone's needs.

Kevin Caldwell, vice president of enterprise assurance at Juran Institute (Southbury, CT), says people learn in different ways—visual, sensory, or auditory, for example—and instructors should use all three techniques. Because most classrooms contain students of different abilities, Caldwell tries to even the playing field, "I try to teach at a skill level at the bell shaped curve level and spend extra time with those at opposite ends of that curve." He provides extra time for the others during break-out sessions, or before and after class.

TRAINING EFFECTIVELY

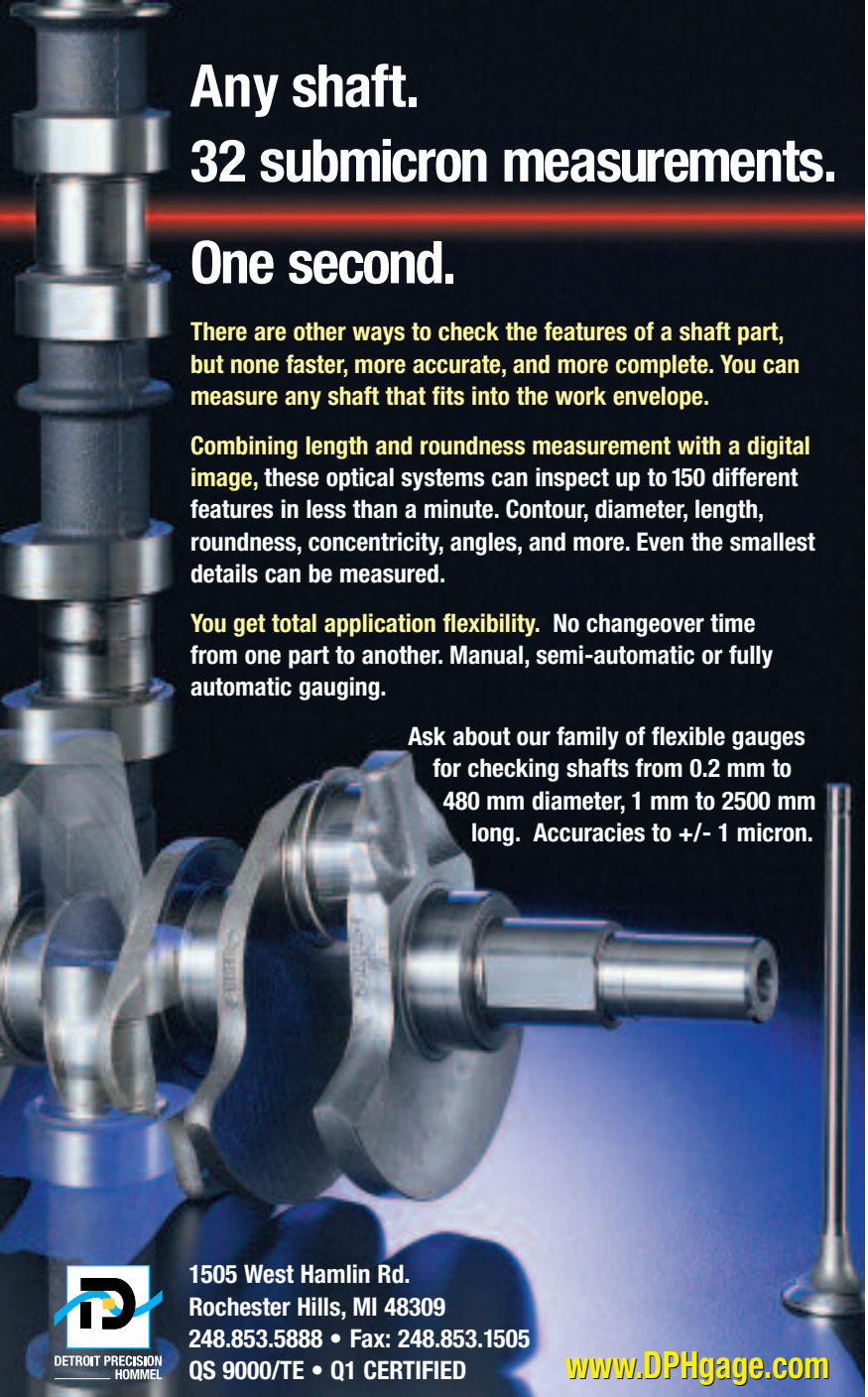
Training can be done internally or by a consultant. "It's a mixed bag," Munro says. Either way, he stresses communication between divisions. The auditing manager should talk to the training manager to schedule training and see what type of training the students received previously. Managers need to ask, "Is this training being used? How effective is it?" Munro says.

At the same time, training also needs time to take effect. When managers are evaluated only on short-term success, training loses some of its value.

In order to get results with training programs, companies should have a clear expectation of changes, how training will be measured and how it will affect the company. Though training is an invaluable tool, in many companies it is the first program to be cut.

"Training should be an investment rather than a perk," Zinkgraf says.

According to The Center for Workforce Success, the education branch of the National Association of Manufacturers, employers should invest at least 3% of payroll, whenever possible, to provide training opportunities for their current employees. Training can take many forms: management, technical, safety, or sales and marketing,



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Steve Zinkgraf, president and CEO of Sigma Breakthrough Technologies Inc., says people respond to trainers who have had experience in the field. Source: SBTI

and should raise the education and skill level of employees.

When done correctly, training can help a company improve and change the workplace environment. Instead of forcing employees to learn, they will take responsibility for their careers and want to learn more.

Zinkgraf saw this firsthand while working for Motorola as a statistician in charge of a manufacturing line that made engine controllers for Ford. At a time when they did not have enough work for the operators, rather than send them home, Motorola put employees through training. Employees worked on their own Six Sigma-type projects and learned how the business was run so they could make good business decisions. "The transformation was close to miraculous. All the training was aimed at improving their performance to get rid of defects," Zinkgraf says.

Motorola required that everyone in the company go through 40 hours of training per year, and employees noticed how training made their lives easier.

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"They were screaming for more than 40 hours of training," Zinkgraf says.

For training to be effective, organizations need to look at gaps in performance. "How good could they be with what they have in hand? If you aren't moving there, the training's not doing very good," Zinkgraf says.

Charles Austin, gold medalist in the high jump in the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, used this approach to set a world record and shared his experiences at a client appreciation meeting at SBTI. As a freshman in college, he looked at the current world records and thought if he did everything perfectly, he should be able to set a world record. He began working toward this goal. Even when struck with a debilitating knee injury, Austin kept working through the process, spending four hours a day in the Texas heat, working toward his goal. Eventually he broke the world record by clearing 7 feet 10 inches on his final jump.

Zinkgraf says companies need to do the same thing to achieve their goals—consider where they are at and where they want to be.

Though the training depends on the client, Zinkgraf says clients generally have a pretty clear idea of what they want to get out of it. Most of time it is "full-speed ahead" training, but Zinkgraf has noticed a tendency for companies to ask for green belt or black belt training and nothing more. "If you're training around expectations for performance, then you're in good shape. If you're training just to tell customers that you have green belts and black belts running around, that's all you've got," Zinkgraf says. "It's discouraging that companies think they'll get benefits just by throwing people through a training mill."

Six Sigma began more than 12 years ago, and is still helping companies improve. "I don't think it's going because people perceive it as a training program," Zinkgraf says. "Six Sigma is guiding companies to make an investment in their employees well above the traditional levels. Previously, the idea of sending someone to four weeks of training to do process improvement was hardly an option. Now they do it willingly."

Forrest Breyfogle, founder and CEO, Smarter Solutions Inc. (Austin, TX),

also stresses the importance of goals. "Training that just teaches the tools isn't it. They want to see an impact to the bottom line," Breyfogle says. Instead of teaching isolated tools, training should also teach a thought process to put it all together. "A lot of training is not done very well in my mind," Breyfogle adds.

Because companies want to see results, Breyfogle says sometimes it

helps to work on projects that show a quick return on investment. At the same time, it is not just a matter of executing a project, but also looking at data, and companies must create a system to analyze it. Companies will not have any quick fixes to plant problems because they are creating infrastructure.

Sometimes getting executive involvement in Six Sigma and other programs may be difficult, but employ-

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ees also may need motivation to participate. "Some people will see the benefits of it and others won't," Breyfogle says. Ideally, the employees should want to improve the organization, be a good project manager and an analytical thinker who can look at the big picture. "As you can imagine, not everybody has these characteristics," Breyfogle says. "Those people that fit this profile can get really excited about methodologies."

ACCESS TO TRAINING

After companies have set goals and selected the individuals that will receive training, they now must decide how to go about the training.

Larry Cates, president and CEO of Global Learning Systems (Frederick, MD), says, "Companies are doing the best they can—it's a matter of how they can do it better." He offers some advice: training should connect quality to culture change and affect day-to-day operations. "Quality is all about how you operate on a daily basis," Cates says.

Conflicting schedules mean some employees cannot get to a classroom or live meeting, so employers must be creative to meet their needs. Companies should provide employees access to training, and then hold them accountable for it.

Mobile training is one option—companies provide on-the-job training on the shop floor, not at large group meetings or classroom sessions. The goal is to deliver the training to the people, not the people to the training.

Generally e-learning is simulation-based and still involves collaboration. Even if an employee is working on his own, he can still get help from a workgroup or coach. Six Sigma programs are generally customized, and also offer a lot of video training.

Providing access to training is not enough, though. "Just because you hand the training to someone doesn't mean it will work perfectly," Cates points out. Companies need to find a good balance between making training accessible and making it worthwhile.

When starting a program, Global Learning Systems first asks, What are the corporate objectives? What's in it for the stakeholders—executives, customers and workforce? Global Learning Systems want to determine what will be of the most value to them and show them the benefits of training, whether it is through promotions, added safety, or helping them save money in their business unit. A lot of the training is scenario-based so it is as user-friendly and engaging as possible.

"If you can relate to something, you're going to engage with it a lot quicker," Cates says. **Q**

For more information on the companies mentioned in this article, visit their Web sites:

Global Learning Systems,
www.globallearningsystems.com;
Juran Institute, www.juran.com;
Ram Q Universe, www.ramquniverse.com;
Sigma Breakthrough Technologies Inc.,
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