

Those Who Can Do, Teach

One way to provide growth opportunities for employees in flat organizations is to provide them with opportunities to train and mentor others. Employees benefit from the leadership development, learning opportunities, appreciation and recognition that come from facilitating learning. The challenge, of course, is how to turn a subject matter expert into a skilled facilitator of learning. The key involves building on the skills of the employee while providing support through skill development and solid learning design.

Selection

While the option of becoming an internal trainer is perfect for some employees, it's not for everyone. Here are a few characteristics to look for that might indicate an employee would thrive in a learning environment:

- Is the person naturally helpful? This would be the kind of person who is often seen providing support and guidance to others.
- Does the person enjoy taking on new challenges? It's not always easy to transform from a Subject Matter Expert (SME) so you want to select someone who enjoys jumping into new situations.
- Is the person respected? People who are known for their technical knowledge, problem-solving skills or leadership skills often garner respect from their peers, which is important for gaining credibility as a facilitator.

Preparation

We know that SMEs need help making the transition to facilitators. Provide new trainers with an understanding of adult learning, facilitation skills training and hands-on support as they embark on their first learning initiatives.

Don't expect employees to manage all of their existing responsibilities while adding the responsibility of training. Meet with new trainers to determine how much of their existing work, if any, they will manage while taking on new training responsibilities.

Design

Involve new trainers in learning design. After all, as SMEs they bring a great deal of value to the design process. They will ensure that the learning is relevant, real-life and easily applicable to the learner's job. Don't, however, rely on them to lead instructional design until they have more experience under their belts.

If your organization is getting flatter and you're worried about stifling employee growth, consider the benefits of creating opportunities for employees to teach, coach and mentor others. It's a great way to build advancement and recognition into a flat organization.