

ShaughnessyHowell...

Taking Training to New Heights

by Rosemary K. Ryan

Soaring high above the competition at The Ontario Society for Training & Development awards ceremony 2000 was ShaughnessyHowell Inc. President, Marion Thomson Howell, was on hand in Toronto to accept two – count them *two* – awards in recognition of companies which have developed, produced and delivered original and innovative products in the training and development field.

Known as OTTERS (Ontario's Top Training Excellence Recognition), ShaughnessyHowell received high praise from judges for their Retail

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Employee and Store Operator Orientation Programs developed for Canada Post Corporation. Excellence in design, ease of use and recognition of diverse training needs for program participants were cited as distinctive features earning ShaughnessyHowell the prestigious OTTERS.

“(These awards) recognize that we develop quality training programs,” says Thomson Howell. “One

of the most overused words in the training industry is ‘customized’... When clients really need something customized – developed from scratch – there are few training companies to talk to. That’s what we do. Canada Post needed orientation training programs developed that could immediately tailor training to any employee’s needs. That’s customization!”

Thomson Howell’s enthusiasm sizzles when she talks about the enormous challenge of putting together orientation programs. “It’s really interesting, very creative work. It’s like a big puzzle, finding out what’s already in place, building that into something comprehensive if it’s already effective, and determining new training needs to make employees effective.” That’s really the first step in creating truly customized training programs, says Thomson Howell – determining what people need to perform effectively, then deciding on the best way to help them become effective.

“We never start with what’s on the shelf,” stresses Thomson Howell. “We evaluate what employees know and don’t know in order to fast track training, to determine what they need to know in order to do the job.” The orientation programs developed for Canada Post did just that whether it was for groups or sole individuals. “Most companies wait until they get a group of people together to start training,” says Thomson Howell. “Well, that may be nine months

after some have started in the position and by then it’s too late for them. We developed a plan where even one person’s training could start immediately.”

In a nutshell, Thomson Howell says the two winning programs involved mapping out skills people do and don’t have in such areas as technology, products and services, selling, etc., then fulfilling their training needs where ‘knowledge gaps’ existed. Specified categories, learning objectives and tasks are performed and documented for each and every trainee.

What’s quite interesting – surprising even – is that most corporations tend to focus their training in areas where it may be least required. For example, Thomson Howell says often new employees are trained how to use a computer system; how to pick up the phone and direct a call; learn product features; that kind of thing.

Important stuff to be sure, but how to solve problems; how to find answers; how to deal with customers – that’s of greater value to new employees and to the company. “Many organizations are surprised,” says Thomson Howell. “For Canada Post’s programs, we talked to people in the jobs, found out what obstacles they encountered, how they solved them, who they approached for answers, things they wish they’d known when they started, these kinds of things.” This type of invaluable data, and more, was rolled into two fluid, flexible and award-winning orientation programs which include a toolkit of workbooks, video cassette and a guide to existing and extensive corporate manuals.

On a final note, Thomson Howell says the brightest employers sell themselves to their employees. “Of course you need people there physically but what you want is their heart and soul. Have business cards ready and waiting for them on the *first* day of the job – it’s a small, inexpensive gesture that buys great goodwill!” Combine those kinds of ideas with effective training and the outcome is a distinct shift in mindset: Employees take ownership of their actions. Suddenly, it becomes *their* training program, *their* technology, *their* customers and that can only lead to one thing: Employees who infuse their jobs with excellence, pride and commitment. That’s the kind of outcome ShaughnessyHowell builds into each and every training program they develop. And that’s what takes their training programs to new heights. □

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ShaughnessyHowell earned their first OTTER (Ontario’s Top Training Excellence Recognition) for excellence in design, ease of use, and recognition of diverse training needs for program participants.