

Times are tough and everyone knows it – there's not a person in your company who hasn't heard that budgets are being cut and travel reduced, and outside training programs are off the list. Yet it is very important to keep your employees motivated and engaged in their work, and encourage them to continue to learn and develop new ideas.

Most firms have a wealth of training resources available to people inside their own organizations and now, during this significant economic downturn, there is a unique opportunity to create new learning events by developing cross-training, mentoring and shadowing programs. When budgets are tight, using internal resources to provide valuable professional growth and development opportunities can be a smart strategy and offer an incentive to employees to stay with your organization and remain actively engaged in their work.

Learning at the Best Companies

Many of the 100 Best Companies to Work For develop individual learning and development plans for their employees, or enroll entire groups of employees in training classes that will support their continuous growth and development. A key component of many of these programs is the incorporation of knowledge sharing among current employees.

Every Best Company leader will tell you that their employees are the engine that runs the organization – yet so will most leaders in other organizations as well. So what's different at a Best Company? In the Best Companies, leaders and managers provide support for employees to learn and grow through multiple avenues – in-house training, on the job learning, and external training or educational support. They also actively engage their employees in the process of determining what knowledge, skills and experiences will be most valuable to the employee's career progress and serve the needs of the business.

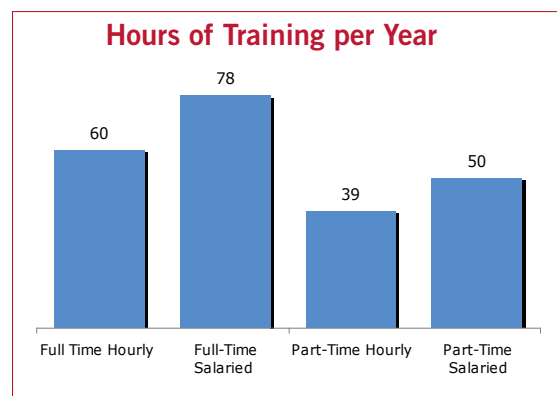
When budgets are tight, the external programs may be minimized while internal training opportunities can be expanded. Using internal resources allows the very important process of professional training and development to continue, develops strong relationships between senior practitioners and those new to a profession or job, and maintains morale among employees. Both teachers and learners see the investment in their skill development as a positive sign that leaders and managers have confidence that this economic downturn – while clearly a significant one – will at some point end.

Customer Service Boot Camp

At PCL Construction, (#28 on the 2009 100 Best Companies to Work for list), a "Pre-Con Boot Camp" training course is offered that focuses on pre-construction services that are particularly valuable to developing strong relationship with customers. This internally developed course follows a "boot camp" theme and is an intense four-day session that walks participants through best practices for providing excellence in pre-construction services to the firm's clients. This course has received excellent reviews and is delivered yearly to employees interested in pursuing a career in pre-construction services.

As part of its employee ownership culture, PCL has a commitment to promote from within. In the past 12 months, about 10% of employees (non-craft) were promoted to positions of greater responsibility. PCL also actively fosters an atmosphere of "each one, teach one". This type of mentoring allows the talents of senior managers to filter down through the employees as well as bring forth new innovative approaches from younger staff.

leaders and managers provide support for employees to learn and grow through multiple avenues



Numbers represent hours of training per employee per year

Coaching and Guidance

There are many ways that Best Companies provide information to newly hired employees, and to those seeking career progress. S.C. Johnson, (#81 on the 2009 100 Best Companies to Work for list), uses mentor and internal internship programs to insure that the accumulated wisdom carried in the minds and experiences of senior employees is passed on to aspiring leaders and people seeking career growth.

In 2007, 241 mentor/mentee pairs participated in the mentoring program, with both mentors and mentees reporting that the program helped them grow. In this program, mentors are volunteers from the company who help by coaching and guiding a mentee. A Mentoring Steering Committee identifies good mentor/mentee pairs based on work experiences, shared interests, skill sharing and more. Mentors work with mentees for 18 months, with the mentee setting the objectives for the relationship through a formal agreement process. Typically both the mentor and mentee contribute about 45 hours to the relationship over the course of a year and a half.

With many career paths to choose from at SC Johnson, employees often express an interest in various areas of the business. But, changing jobs can be a difficult decision to make, especially in an uncertain economy when the likelihood of success in a new position is unclear. SC Johnson helps employees grab a snapshot of a position within the company before they make the decision to commit. Through the Internal Internship Program, an employee can spend three to six months in another area of the company shadowing a fellow employee to determine if the role fits their skills, career goals and personal interests. The employee remains a member of the team from which they came and returns to the original position once the internship is completed. The skills and knowledge acquired through the internship make the employee a viable candidate if a comparable position should become available in the future. This type of program is an excellent way of developing deep bench strength among current employees so that when the economy does pick back up people are ready to move quickly on new opportunities.

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Follow My Shadow

Like SC Johnson, MITRE (#66 on the 2009 100 Best Companies to Work for list) is looking for ways to keep investing in the growth and development of its employees, with a particular focus on helping women explore opportunities where they might be under-represented. MITRE's shadowing program provides an opportunity for junior level technical and professional women to "shadow" a senior manager and interact in a meeting that would otherwise not be open to them. Managers commit to at least three meetings with their shadow: To gather information about each other and determine what situation to shadow; the actual shadowing experience, and a third meeting to debrief. Many managers and their shadows have more than three meetings and continue this professional development relationship over a longer period of time.

At Wegman's Supermarkets (#5 on the 2009 100 Best Companies to Work for list) job shadowing is one way for employees to explore new and different areas of the company, especially the behind-the-scenes departments at corporate headquarters. In the Consumer Affairs division, the last Tuesday of each month is shadow day, and typically, 'shadowers' come from various stores. They spend time in each area of the department - sitting with the customer communications group; touring the test kitchen, working with the community relations team, and attending a staff meeting.

"shadowing" programs enable companies to keep investing in the growth and development of their employees

Store security specialists get hands-on experience as they shadow in the Loss Prevention Communications Center for two days as part of their training. Employees who are interested in loss prevention as a future career have opportunities to shadow for part of a day to see the scope of that department's responsibilities. Dispatchers from the local fire department and 911 also are encouraged to shadow in Loss Prevention and vice versa.

Share the Wealth of Knowledge

Amy Lyman, Director Corporate Research
Great Place to Work®



Young employees, particularly scholarship winners, often ask to visit a department that aligns with their course of study. Student architects visit the design services department; communications majors might spend a day in advertising; those studying computer science are welcomed into the IT department.

Involve Everyone in the Future

Engaging employees in a variety of ways to create solutions to difficult situations can raise spirits, strengthen ties and deepen a sense of commitment to the organization, work group and tasks at hand. There is a tremendous willingness during tough times for people to reach out and help each other make it through – leaders can tap into this spirit of cooperation and collaboration by actively engaging people in discussions, sharing information, and asking for suggestions.

While many discussions will be solely for input purposes – ideas are sought yet managers will ultimately make the decisions about what goes forward - there are times when groups of employees will come up with creative approaches to solving a dilemma that either management never considered, or that would only work if offered as an idea coming from employees.

All of the approaches discussed here to address the need to continually invest in people's growth and development can be successful during slow times as well as boom times. Engaging your employees in the process of helping others to learn and grow will enhance people's sense of control by giving them mechanisms to contribute to solutions rather than just worrying about problems.

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Any Company Can Create a Great Workplace

Our Mission is to Help Them Do It



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- **Recognize the Best Companies** for their achievements through our international Best Companies lists. In the U.S., these lists include Fortune's 100 Best Companies to Work For®, as well as the "Best Small & Medium Companies to Work for in America" published in collaboration with SHRM.
- **Help companies create and sustain great workplace cultures** through our consulting services. Our data collection tools (employee survey, focus groups, 360° professional development tool) educational workshops and training programs, action planning system, and strategic advising services all support the transformation process within any organization. The Institute's unique access to Best Companies' data allows us to offer unparalleled benchmarking opportunities, best practice information, and transformation insight to our consulting clients.
- **Share resources, best practices, and Institute research** through our education services. These include peer networking groups, workshops, conferences, and publications which enable organization leaders to learn directly from each other, as well as benefit from our wealth of knowledge and lessons learned from the Best Companies and our clients.

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Additional Resources

- Keep up to date on the current Best Workplaces in Ireland in our annual supplement to the Irish Independent published every February
- Nominate your company to be on the Best Workplaces in Ireland list by visiting www.greatplacetowork.ie/best/nom-form.php
- Consulting Services: We believe passionately that any organization of any size or industry can become a great workplace. Great Place to Work® Institute, Inc. consulting services are based on 25 years of researching Best Companies, and our in-depth knowledge of how companies transform can help you achieve higher levels of productivity and profit. Through our assessment, action planning, and advisory services, we can help you to measure, benchmark, and positively impact employees' experiences of your organization.