

**Small Training Department—Big Impact:
Having the Right Skills**
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In a specialized training role, you need to have specialized competencies, such as design, needs assessment, or facilitation. But what if you are a one- or two-person training department and are responsible for all aspects of training? What do you need to be good at to have an impact on your organization? Successfully managing a small training department requires a broad base of competencies.

- Business knowledge
- Knowledge of training and performance
- Organizational and management skills
- Intellectual skills
- Relational skills
- Technical skills
- Resourcefulness
- Resilience

Business Knowledge. Having a basic understanding of business dynamics, and of your organization's goals, performance and key success factors is essential. Make sure that you have a good understanding of business basics and of your industry. Take time to read industry publications to keep on top of current trends. Understanding your organization's budgeting system will be helpful since you will need to project and report the training budget in language that the organization understands.



Knowledge of Training and Performance Consulting. Having a basic understanding of needs assessment methods, adult learning theory, writing learning objectives, training design, facilitation skills, and performance consulting is critical for a one-person training shop. You will need these skills to perform tasks, such as needs assessment, design, and delivery. In addition, you will need this knowledge to review training plans or programs that are developed or purchased.

Organization and Management Skills. Since a key to success is focus and careful management, you need to create some system to organize yourself. Whether you use a simple to-do list or complex project planning software, you need to keep yourself on track. Be sure that you create a

checklist to help you manage program logistics. Knowing when to follow up can prevent costly mistakes and wastefulness. When managing budget expenses, you need to ensure that vendors are paid in a timely way or you may encounter problems. For example, without your follow up on invoices that are submitted late in the calendar year, vendors may not be paid in the current year. If this happens, you may be under budget in the current year and over budget for the upcoming year.

Intellectual Skills. Having solid cognitive skills goes a long way in enhancing your effectiveness in a small training department. Critical intellectual skills are observing, identifying problems and priorities, asking thoughtful questions, analyzing data, and taking a systems approach to problems. You'll need these skills when assessing needs, establishing your business savvy, uncovering the real causes of problems and proposing realistic solutions that can work in your organization.



Relational Skills. A key part of being successful is building relationships with people throughout your organization and the broader community. You need to be able to create a positive impression, identify peoples' needs and expectations, and attend to verbal and non-verbal clues. Other essential communication skills include giving feedback, coaching, and influencing others. You need to give effective feedback and coaching to sponsors as well as trainees, and to convince stakeholders to support your training strategy and training initiatives. The more flexible you can be in your influence style, the better. Don't assume that a training need or problem is obvious to others. Be patient in clarifying the benefits and requirements of training in everyday language that your customers can understand.

Technical Skills. Being able to use the web, create presentations, and manage a budget on a computer are critical in a small training department. At the very least, you need to know how to use a word program and some presentation program, such as PowerPoint. Knowing Excel or some other type of spreadsheet program to create and track a budget and to evaluate programs is helpful. Become familiar with the advantages, requirements, and constraints of various e-learning options.

Given the wealth of resources available on the Internet, you should know how to conduct research using the Internet. Also, you need to know enough “systems speak” that you can converse intelligently with your organization’s systems team to identify the organization’s capabilities to support training. Find out about your organization’s intranet and e-mail capabilities so that you can take advantage of them as delivery systems.



Resourcefulness. Thinking of a variety of options is essential to your success. Tunnel vision and rigidity can be your demise in a small department. A broad base of potential internal and external resources can help you leap into action and meet a tight deadline. The more flexible your solutions, the more likely you will find the best approach for your organization. As training dollars shrink, you’ll need to cut back on training. Don’t assume that because a program is shorter than ideal that it is of no value. People can be motivated to try out new skills when they have participated in an inspiring “lunch and learn” program.

Resilience. Resilience—bouncing back from stress and change—may be the most important competency for anyone today. A major challenge is keeping up with constant change and pressure without being overwhelmed. Resilient people tend to have an opportunity orientation, focus, flexibility, organization in the face of ambiguity, and a proactive approach. Learn to find the opportunity in any change and look for ways to actively support the success of organizational change. Also, be sure to take care of your physical and mental health. Remember, when you are sick it impacts the entire department.

Enhancing Your Value to the Organization. One of the best ways to ensure that you develop the necessary knowledge, skills, and personal attributes is to create a developmental plan and then *do it!* Make your development part of your performance plan. Be sure to review your developmental plan with your manager and allocate some budget for your own growth!

When you are starting out, you may find that you have many developmental needs. Rather than trying to learn everything at once, select two or three learning priorities and set some realistic goals.



Look for a variety of ways to enhance your skills by selecting cost-effective learning activities, which meet both your and your organization’s needs. Attend local and national training conferences to build skills and increase your network of resources. Perhaps you can job shadow people in different roles in the company. Find a mentor who can provide feedback and coaching and be a support when you are feeling discouraged.

Remember *you* are the department’s *primary asset*. As your knowledge and skills increase, so does the capability and effectiveness of the training department.

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Dr. McCoy will be speaking on “Essential Competencies for Managing a Small Training Department” on May 25th 2004 at the International ASTD Conference, Washington DC.

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