

Ken Moore Associates Presents

Commentary

Business Literacy in the New World Order

The implosion of business markets around the world has caused everyone to re-think what it takes to run a successful business in today's economy. Whether you own a small auto repair shop with 6 employees or a larger manufacturing company with 700 employees, never before have improving your business skill sets across functional lines been so necessary.

For decades, developing silos of expertise in individual business disciplines such as finance, human resources, marketing and logistics has been the way to advance personal careers and organizational objectives. Now, as a result of downsizing, outsourcing and technology, experts in those fields are harder to find and managers are forced to make decisions in areas where they have limited experience or knowledge.

Here are some business literacy program suggestions. These are in response to corporate recruiter recommendations at a major New York university:

- 1. Learn how the business operates and know as much about the business as possible, e.g.:**
 - a. How does it make money?**
 - b. What is its competitive advantage?**
 - c. Who are your customers and why do they buy from you?**
 - d. Who are your main competitors and why to people buy from them instead of you?**

- 2. Learn how to read and understand your company's financial condition. If you are a public corporation, that information is freely available in the company's annual report or 10-k documents.**
 - a. What are the financial pressure points that executives worry about, and from which most decisions are made?**
 - b. How does the work of your department help advance the business objectives of the company?**
 - c. Are your company's financial metrics trending in the right or wrong direction? How does that impact the decisions you must make?**

- 3. Study the objectives of the other silos in your company and link the work that you do to help them achieve their goals:**
 - a. Link your work to the success of other silos in your company. The failure of the product delivery team to deliver its goods on time and in**

- the condition specified in the sales contract impacts everyone, not just one silo;
- b. **If there are significant product defects, learn to identify the root cause of such defects and how can you help fix them. You don't have to be an expert in the other fields, but your job may be to find the experts and work with the financing team to secure money to fix the problems;**
4. **Discover who is the best in various areas and emulate their procedures and practices:**
 - a. **Determine benchmarks of excellence within your industry and determine how they achieved that rank. Kodak once had a serious problem delivering their products to the dealers where customers could buy them. They sent a team to L.L. Bean to study their distribution methods. The result: distribution problems were virtually eliminated;**
 - b. **Think creatively and outside the box for your solutions. One automotive parts company was having trouble with their tire installation process. They sent a team to study NASCAR technicians and adapted some of their procedures for their technicians. As a result, tire installation time was reduced by 50%.**
 5. **Improve constantly and forever, your business literacy skills.**
 - a. **Study the business environment and the forces that impact it (technology, demographics, legal & political, culture, etc.)**
 - b. **Improve your mastery of your own discipline and the changes demanded within its practice;**
 - c. **Step outside your silo of expertise and help other silos, through your work, achieve their objectives. The failure of one silo affects the success of the other silos and the organization.**

How do you gain this knowledge?

1. **Most schools, colleges, and universities do a thriving business teaching business literacy skills. Check out their curriculum and contact them for details;**
2. **Ask your trade organization to sponsor programs in your area of development interest. Attend other trade organization meetings to see what programs they offer and talk with their membership. The chances are good that they are also interested in how you can help them in their silo;**
3. **Contact the writers of articles such as these. They are always willing to help people achieve their objectives;**
4. **Read and study reputable publications in other disciplines and general business magazine, newspapers, and websites. You'll soon see patterns emerging of common issues and interests;**

- 5. Ask your internal experts in every discipline to present tutorials on their field of expertise. Lunchtime seminars and workshops are marvelous opportunities to gain knowledge of other functions and weave the threads together into a seamless process.**

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