Distance Education Policy Manual

by
Bob Daumer
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Introduction

Employee development is a necessity for ACME Timeshares, Inc. (herein referred to as the Company) to continue to lead the vacation ownership industry. As such, it is imperative that the Company's employees possess the best competencies achievable. This policy provides the learning & development framework that will ensure the Company's competitive advantage and lead in the industry. Specifically, this policy focuses on the employee's of the Company's call center operations.

Characteristics and Demographics of the Call Centers

The Company's call centers are geographically dispersed within the United States. Call centers are located in Miami, Florida; Tampa, Florida; and Seattle, Washington. Not only is there a geographic separation, the call center employees are also separated by time because the Seattle center is in a time zone that is three hours behind both Miami and Tampa.

Approximately 600 employees, who work in a variety of roles, make up the staff of the call center operations. Within this staff is a variety of levels of employment, from vice president down to vacation counselor. Additionally, the experience is diverse within this staff. Some employees have been with the company more that 20 years whereas others are freshly hired.

As with most staffs, this staff is culturally and economically diverse. Culturally there are many ethnic groups employed with the Company. With this comes a diverse set of traditions and beliefs. Also, because of the varied levels of employment or external family situations, the staff is economically diverse. Those in the management/leadership level positions earn a higher salary than those in the counselor positions. Salary is very important to the morale and motivation of the employees.

Nearly every task an employee completes makes use of some sort of technology. For the

most part, this technology comes in the form of using a computer and a variety of software and systems. The technology infrastructure is extensive and connects all employees together, regardless of geographic location or specific local time. Just as the staff is diverse in many other ways, so are their technical competencies. Some employees are highly experienced computer and technology users where others are novices.

Learning and Development within the Call Centers

The call center operations are supported by a learning and development team that is dedicated to this staff. At the corporate office, which is also the Tampa location, there is the director, the instructional design team, and a team of facilitators led by a manager. The Miami and Seattle locations only have a team of facilitators led by a manager. It is the responsibility of the instructional design team to create learning and development products that support all employees at all locations. The facilitators at each location implement those learning and development products. The managers help schedule and maintain training calendars and the locations' specific budget.

Mission statement. A team of Learning & Development professionals whose daily actions influence the performance of employees for today and tomorrow.

Definition of distance education. Distance education is the combination of learning and instruction that occurs when there is a separation between learner and facilitator. This separation can exist as a chronological, geographical, or intellectual separation. Technology, not limited to digital means, is used to bridge the separation. The education can be synchronous or asynchronous. Through interactivity, employees create a connection between themselves and a facilitator (human or virtual). All employees are accountable for their own learning and are

expected to fully interact with the facilitator and support personnel throughout the educational program.

<div align="center">Academic Policy (1.0)</div>

The academic aspect of the Company's distance education policy provides the guidelines for the training calendar, instructional design techniques, assessment criteria, evaluation methods, alignment to the strategic plan, and measuring success (Dooley, K, Lindner, J, Dooley, J., 2005; Galloway, D. 2005; Harp, C. 1995; Ko, S. & Rossen, S. 2004; Nathan, A. & Stanleigh, M., 1991; Piskurich, G., 2006; Restauri, S., 2004; Schweizer, H., 2004; Shaw, R., 2004; Tu, C., 2004; Yang, J., 2006).

1.1 Training Calendar

A training calendar shall be maintained to provide a means for tracking past, present, and future training offerings. Employees may reference this calendar to search for upcoming courses. Management and leadership may use this calendar as a means of labor and time management.

1.2 Instructional Design Techniques

The instructional design team is responsible for the integrity of the instructional design techniques used in the creation and maintenance of training programs and courses. Each instructional designer is expected to apply and deploy systematic instructional design, based on the Dick and Carey model. Instructional designers are also expected to understand the three major theories of learning – behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism. Additionally, an appropriate combination of technologies must exist in all training programs and courses.

1.3 Performance Assessment Criteria

All training programs and courses must include an assessment that is linked to performance objectives set during the design of the program or course. Assessments should be

appropriate for the method of facilitation being used. They are not limited to paper-based question and answer format—observational and practical hands-on activities/scenarios may be implemented if deemed the most appropriate means of assessment.

Employees who perform below the average must be consulted as a means of identifying the learner's hardship or the fault in the assessment. No learner can fail a training program or course simply through performing poorly on an assessment.

1.4 Evaluation Methods

All training programs and courses must include a summative evaluation that each employee completes. A standard set of questions must be used but additional questions, as deemed necessary due to the means of facilitation, may be added.

1.5 Alignment to the Strategic Plan

Training programs and courses must align with the strategic plan prior to the approval to proceed is granted. As the Company changes direction to adapt to the industry, the learning and development offerings must align with the corporate direction. Learning and development is also an influence on the strategic plan. The director is responsible for working with senior leadership to provide guidance on the performance of the employees and their future needs.

1.6 Measuring Success

Performance data will be collected as a means of measuring the success of distance education training programs and courses. Existing face-to-face training has proven to be effective; therefore, any implementation of distance education must prove to be equally effective. To determine this equality, data must be collected so that metrics can be analyzed. Areas for analysis may include, but are not limited to: attrition, occurrences, average handle time, expected hold times, and abandon rate.

Fiscal and Administrative Policy (2.0)

The fiscal and administrative aspect of the Company's distance education policy provides the guidelines for the training budget, accounts payable, and performance expectations (Harp, C., 1995; Ko, S. & Rossen, S., 2004; Schweizer, H., 2004).

2.1 Training Budget

On an annual basis, in coordination with the Company's budget activities, the learning and development team will prepare a budget for the upcoming year. This is ultimately the responsibility of the director; however, all team members may be asked to contribute. During this process, the upcoming year's learning and development activities and needs must be estimated. Training managers are required to provide estimates for number of training courses that will be offered, the estimated month they will occur in, and the number of employees that will be in attendance. Additionally, the managers are responsible for determining the appropriate salaries for those employees who report into them. The instructional design team is responsible for estimating the technology needs for the upcoming year. This includes program and course supplies, computer software, and computer hardware and accessories.

Unanticipated projects which arise during a budgeted year are assigned a financial allocation during senior management approval. Learning and development budget requirements are funded as a result of this approval.

2.2 Accounts Payable

Each learning and development team at each call center has an individual budget which roles up into the global learning and development budget. Specific charges or training expenses must be appropriately billed to the proper site budget so that end of year budget reconciliation is possible.

Major costs, such as the development of new classroom space or technology labs, may be shared among other departments. Approval at the director level is necessary for expenses to be shared across departmental budgets.

2.3 Performance Expectations

All employees of the learning and development department are expected to contribute to distance education initiatives. The instructional designers will create training programs and courses for both traditional training and distance education. Facilitators are expected to facilitate both traditional training and distance education, when a facilitator is required. The department managers and the director will maintain the business culture and support of both traditional training and distance education.

Labor Management Policy (3.0)

The labor management aspect of the Company's distance education policy provides the guidelines for learning and development internal training and continued learning, industry comparable salaries for the learning and development professionals, and learning and development workload (Dooley et al, 2005; Dunlap, J. 2005, Ko, S. & Rossen, S., 2004; Piskurich, G., 2006; Restauri, S., 2004; Schweizer, H., 2004; Yelon, S., 2006).

3.1 Internal and Continued Learning

Effective training requires a competent and highly skilled staff of learning and development professionals. It is expected that all employees of the learning and development department participate in learning events for both traditional and distance education. The department budget supports this internal and continuous learning so that the employees do not personally incur the full cost. An annual limit of $2,000.00 is allotted for employee development.

Amounts greater than this, excluding tuition reimbursement, require the approval of the vice president.

Employees who wish to further their own education may qualify for the corporate tuition reimbursement program. The qualification requirements for tuition reimbursement are maintained by human resources. Advanced degrees may be used to meet the continuous learning expectation.

3.2 Industry Comparable Salaries

With the expectation that each employee of the learning and development department contributes to distance education, appropriate compensation must be budgeted and awarded. The department director and managers are responsible for conducting timely salary and compensation research. One should consider that an employee who is expected to contribute to both traditional and distance education may earn a higher salary than one who only contributes to only traditional or only distance education training. Overall professional performance plays a significant factor in the compensation and salary offer each employee receives. Ultimately, raises and promotions must comply with the Company's human resource policy and exceptions may only be made with the approval of the vice president and human resources.

3.3 Workload

To balance out the workload of each learning and development professional, the managers will be the main point of contact for training requests, regardless if they are traditional or distance education. The facilitators and instructional designers are expected to project manage their own work and report back to the managers. Should a workload become too exhaustive, a manager must be notified and he or she will explore options for re-evaluating the workload.

Legal Policy (4.0)

The legal aspect of the Company's distance education policy provides the guidelines for intellectual property and copyright (Hurst, P., Palya, W., & Mills, W., 2005; Ko. S., & Rossen, S., 2004; Schweizer, H., 2004).

4.1 Intellectual Property

Each employee, upon hire, signs an intellectual property rights agreement which states that all items created by the employee on Company time or property belong to the Company and that the employee relinquishes any and all intellectual rights to that item or creation.

4.2 Copyright

Each employee is expected to respect the copyrights of materials found during research. In doing so, each employee agrees to not use copyrighted materials in the creation or facilitation of traditional or distance education. Unlike institutional education, corporate learning and development is linked directly to company profits. Therefore, Fair Use does not apply and copyrighted materials may not be used unless expressed written permission from the copyright holder is requested and received.

Employee (Learner) Support Services Policy (5.0)

The employee support services aspect of the Company's distance education policy provides the guidelines for employee communication, employee user accounts, and employee reference materials (Ko, S. & Rossen, S., 2004; Piskurich, G., 2006; Restauri, S., 2004; Schweizer, H., 2004; Tu, C., 2004; Watkins, R., 2005; Yang, J., 2006).

5.1 Employee Communication

Employees who are learners in distance education programs or courses must have a clear understanding of all communication channels available to them. Interaction between the learner

and the facilitator and between learners is necessary for distance education to be successful. Through the created materials, the instructional designers must provide this information in the most appropriate manner. Similarly, the facilitators are expected to reinforce and expand upon the appropriate communication channels available.

Communication channels must also be available and understood after the training program or course is completed. Employees need to know when they should contact their supervisor and in which situations it is appropriate to contact learning and development. The more though out the communication paths are, the more successful the employees will be.

5.2 Employee User Accounts

When training programs and courses require the use of a computer system, all user accounts must be set up prior to the start of the program or course. Learning and development is responsible for managing this task. As one the first tasks during the program or course, each learner must verify that his or her account has been set up properly. If any changes are necessary, the facilitator is responsible for contacting the appropriate person and expediting the correction so that valuable learning time is not lost from the training program or course.

5.3 Employee Reference Materials

Distance education training program and course materials must be designed so that the learner has appropriate structure to follow to achieve the performance objectives. This is increasingly more important when the learner only interacts with a standalone computer-based training program or course and the only other interaction is in the form of asynchronous electronic mail. Customized learner feedback is not possible.

Materials must also be designed for use by the employee once he or she leaves the training environment. A training manual is best designed when it becomes a reference manual in the performance environment.

If materials exist beyond the materials provided during the training program or course, the facilitator is responsible for ensuring that the learner can access this additional reference material once they are in the performance environment.

<div align="center">Technology Policy (6.0)</div>

The technology aspect of the Company's distance education policy provides the guidelines for computer classrooms, employee personal computer configuration, learning and development personal computer configuration, and learning and development technology training and support (Ko., S, & Rossen, S., 2004; Restauri, S., 2004; Schweizer, H., 2004; Yelon, S., 2006).

6.1 Computer Classrooms

Learning and development is responsible for maintaining each computer classroom. When the classroom is not being used for traditional training, the room may be opened up for use as a computer lab in which employees can participate in asynchronous or computer-based training programs or courses. During times when the classroom is opened as a lab, a learning and development employee or designee must be available in case an employee encounters technical difficulties.

In cooperation with the information technology department, learning and development will ensure that each computer in the computer classroom has all necessary software and system access available. Similarly, each computer must have adequate hardware components so that learning is not hindered by insufficient computer technology. For example too little random

access memory (RAM) may slow down a computer's response time or a computer without a compact disc (CD) burner may prevent a learner from storing necessary data.

6.2 Employee Personal Computer Configuration

Learning and development will work with operations to ensure that a learner's personal computer is configured properly once a computer software or system training is completed. Personal computer configurations not related to a training program or course is not the responsibility of learning and development and must be handled by operations.

6.3 Learning and Development Personal Computer Configuration

The personal computers for the learning and development professionals must be current with all software and system access that has been, is currently, and may be part of a training program or course. Instructional designers require extensive multimedia production software and robust computer hardware to effectively and efficiently design and produce technology-rich distance education training programs and courses. The facilitators need to have complimentary players and readers that version-match the production software used by the instructional designers.

6.4 Learning and Development Technology Training and Support

With the help of the information technology department, all learning and development professionals will be appropriately trained on how to use all technological components available in the room. This includes, but is not limited to, learner workstations, facilitator workstations, overhead projector, ceiling mounted screen, and ceiling mounted audio system.

<center>Cultural Policy (7.0)</center>

The cultural aspect of the Company's distance education policy provides the guidelines for organizational change, organizational education, and employee/learner diversity (Duhaney,

D., 2004; Galloway, D., 2005; Ko, S. & Rossen, S., 2004; Nathan, A. & Stanleigh, M., 1991; Restauri, S., 2004; Schweizer, H., 2004; Yang, J., 2006).

7.1 Organizational Change

Distance education at the Company is a new method of learning and development. It is expected that the implementation of various types of distance education may endure some friction or pushback. The learning and development director and managers will work to overcome any friction or pushback through partnerships and open dialog. For an organizational change like distance education to be implemented and accepted, an open forum for discussion must exist.

7.2 Organizational Education

To assist in supporting an organizational change for distance education, learning and development will provide all employees with appropriate materials that prove that distance education offers an equivalent, if not better, learning experience than traditional education.

7.3 Employee/Learner Diversity

Although the Company contact centers are all in the United States, the employee population is very diverse. Learning and development, in the creation and facilitation of both traditional and distance education programs and courses, will refrain from adhering to any single ethnic, religious, or gender group. It is the goal of learning and development to align with the Company's diversity pledge and to respect all employees as potentially outstanding learners.

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