The last time you reviewed your curriculum, did something seem to be missing, but you couldn’t put your finger on it? Or have you felt secure about your learning programs only to have employees express on feedback forms your classes are inaccessible, and fail to help them do their jobs better (regardless of what course assessments say)? If so, it may be time for a training department revamp. It’s a huge, but not impossible, undertaking, and a chore that may be inevitable every now and then. The tricky part is ensuring the changes represent a clear improvement over the old training department. Up to the challenge? Training spoke to several companies that were, and lived to tell how they did it.

REVAMP TO MERGE
Chesterfield County, VA, was asked to revamp its training department, Chesterfield University, last year through a merger with the county’s quality office, says Chief Learning Officer Kevin Bruny. The merger rebranded the training department as the Center for Organizational
Excellence. “We were asked to reduce headcount from both departments,” he says. “Chesterfield University, our learning resources, our quality system, and our business process focus remain the same, just under a new department name,” says Bruny. “The challenge is aligning both organizations’ efforts toward a common entity focused on individual and organizational performance.”

Bruny says the county’s learning professionals made sure they understood, and could articulate, the strategic reasons behind the merged departments. Questions they asked themselves included why the request to merge was made and what would be gained by the organization from this change. “Our learning efforts are driven by our strategic plan, and how employees are equipped to meet the desires of that plan in servicing the citizens of the county,” he says.

The county kept its eyes open for pitfalls that could sidetrack learning during the revamp. Bruny saw the potential for at least a few glitches. A pitfall could occur, he says, if training leaders aren’t prepared to take the lead in strategy development for the new department. “The learning professional may need to create or build the strategy during a revamp,” he says. “While it seems backwards, organizational leaders don’t always think in these terms. Our consolidation was a headcount, boxes-on-the-organization-chart exercise. We needed to fill in or create strategy that would make the combined departments a stronger entity for the organization.” Chesterfield’s training team did that, he says, by shifting from a singular focus on learning and quality improvement to an overall drive to create improved organizational performance. “While we see both learning and quality as components, our new department is focused on improving both individual and organizational performance through a more enhanced set of tools.”

**REVAMP TO IMPROVE**

At Mohawk Industries, Inc., a training department revamp was needed to improve the learning offered to employees, and drive business results, says Senior Director, People and Performance Robert Webb. Throughout the process, notes Webb, the learning department maintained its focus. “The primary factor considered when we revamped the training department was

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**QUICK TIPS**

Rebuilding anything, let alone your business function, sounds scary. But it doesn’t have to be that way. With the right approach and resources, rebuilding an organization’s training department can result in improvements your C-suite will thank you for. Here are tips from top companies on training rebuilds done right:

- “First determine if and why there is a need to revamp,” former Vice President, Training at Alltel Wireless Mindy Lane recommends. “I would do that by interviewing and surveying your customers and internal employees. Ask them what your training department is doing well and what areas could be improved. I also would analyze any data you have from Jack and Patti Phillips’ [ROI calculation] or Kirkpatrick’s levels of evaluation.”
- “Determine whether you are delivering effective training that meets the needs of learners and is impacting business objectives,” says Lane. “Once both of those data points are collected, I would define my top three to five objectives and tackle those first.”
- “You must answer this question: How does training need to be structured to align with what needs to be done to support the business?” says Rebecca Ray, former senior vice president, global talent management and development at MasterCard. “Once that is done, you can organize so the department is easy to do business with. Then you can determine what skills, strengths, or areas of expertise are needed to support the business so you can do a gap analysis of your talent.”
- “Look out for any immediate pitfalls that can sidetrack learning professionals during the process. Be careful of the new and fancy—things that are outside the business alignment areas,” says Ray. “In the words of my mother, “Just because you can, doesn’t mean you should.”
- “Opportunities to reduce costs and maintain quality can include increasing the use of e-learning and other technologies to reduce travel costs and reach a broader audience,” says Cyndi Bruce, Director of KPMG LLP’s Center for Learning and Development. “Increasing the use of internal leadership and learning and development resources to facilitate and deliver programs, as well as reducing the number of days of live, in-person training by converting select content to pre- and post-blended delivery modalities are two other options to consider.”
- “Have a clear dialog with your business partners about budgetary implications from the start,” says Vice President, Capital One University Lane Hopkins. “For example, if you expect to deliver fewer programs as a result of budget constraints, it’s essential to ensure your partners understand this and accept this choice before you begin the revamp process.”
- “Leveraging a wide variety of training delivery options will help you create lower-cost solutions in some disciplines and allow for higher-cost solutions in others,” says Hopkins. “Clearly understanding business goals and strategy will allow you to make these decisions appropriately and drive your client to the best outcome.”
- “Know what your high-impact programs are and heavily invest in those,” Hopkins advises, “then balance that with day-to-day development knowledge-building opportunities.”
- Approach improvements with “coulads” rather than “sholds” as in, “You could try this new way of organizing your desk,” rather than “You should do it this way.”
whether the function’s efforts were adequately supporting business goals,” he explains. Webb says he ensured the revamp wouldn’t become unwieldy, losing sight of the original goal of the overhaul—a common revamp pitfall. “As a function, training sometimes can fall prey to ‘mission creep’ because so many different internal clients are pressing for support of their specific needs,” he says. “Most training resources—people, money, time—are finite, so the focus must be squarely on those training initiatives that deliver the best results—and measurable results—for the organization and its people.”

For an optimal revamp, Webb advises keeping learning professionals at the heart of the process. After all, only those involved in the daily workings of the company’s training program can spot potential problems. “Their input is vitally important,” he says. “If they see a red flag, then they have to say, ‘If we make that change, there will be an impact.’” That impact, which Webb says you can’t be shy about bringing up to executives, could be operational and part of the backend of the learning department, or it could be a problem likely to arise within one of the lines of business you provide training for.

Since most training department revamps come with strict budgetary limitations, Webb says when transforming the learning structure you also have to prioritize expenses such as salaries of learning professionals, learning technology, and outside consultants.

For Mohawk, improvements following the revamp are a continuing process. “Our goal is to develop a core curriculum of blended learning for each position in the organization,” says Webb. “The training will continue to be aligned with our core competencies, organizational goals, and our values, and it will be progressive in nature. We’ll utilize both internal and external resources to meet the needs of our customers, from the plant floor to the executive suite.”

REVAMP TO REALIGN

For Loews Hotels, a revamp of the training department aimed to increase efficiencies during the recession, but has blossomed into a long-term plan for increased return on investment, says Director of Education and Development Jenny Lucas. “The longer the recession went on, the more it became evident this is a new way of doing business,” she says. Lucas says she needed to consider her company’s strategic direction. Attaining that alignment to corporate strategy meant changing trainer expectations of their jobs. “It was changing trainer mind-sets that they’re not going to be standing in front of a classroom teaching in a traditional sense. Their job was going to evolve,” she says, meaning their role now would focus more on change management and sustaining corporate culture during a challenging economy. “What was important to us in all the changes we made was protecting both the guest and team member experience. Making the training manager the champion of that—as opposed to a person who teaches in a classroom—was a process, but an important one to make them a partner in the future.”

As the training function at Loews changes, Lucas says her corporate learning team stays in touch with trainers in the field through frequent one-on-one and group conference calls. “We came out in January 2009 with a [training structure] model that would pull trainers into an operations role, giving them responsibilities typically done by other people, and we heard from them that we were asking a lot,” says Lucas. “So we had to tweak the process and make changes. You need to have that flexibility to make sure you’re still delivering what needs to be delivered.”

Along with that flexibility, you need to keep your eye on the ultimate goal—including, for instance, whether your training function would best serve the company as a corporate university or as a more unstructured grouping of programs. “I would start with an overall strategic mind-set. What does your end state look like?” says BB&T University Manager and Executive Vice President Will Sutton. “When you get to the end, do you want to have a training department or a corporate university?” In addition, he suggests ensuring you establish “exceptional relationships with the lines of business and divisions you’re going to be supporting” in the revamped structure.

Whatever direction you decide to take, be sure the foundation of your plan is solid. “Give yourself the luxury of time to figure out your training design processes, the learning paths of the
employees you're in charge of developing, and any certification processes,” says Sutton. “Realize it’s important to build those things because if you don’t, you’ll end up with a collection of classes with no structure or flow to them.”

At McDonald’s USA, LLC, learning professionals keep a sharp eye on where their company is going, and how they can help it achieve its goals by updating training programming. “We’re always looking at where we’re performing today business-wise, and where we want to go,” says Vice President of U.S. Training Diana Thomas. Based on the company’s three- to five-year strategic plan, Thomas says each year she and her learning team colleagues consider what revamps are necessary in the training function. In 2002 and 2003, for instance, when the company was not performing well, the training department was asked to contribute to a new strategic direction. “We stepped back and asked what we needed to do, and once that strategic plan was put together, we looked at what role training had to play in it.”

Thomas says the training function asked itself back then whether its long-term plan worked well with what company leaders were planning. “Part of being a strategic leader is determining what your vision is, what gaps the company has, and how you can align your function around that. That’s something we go through every year, asking ourselves if we have the right vision, whether we’re focused on the right things, what we need to modify, and who we need to bring on board do that.”

“Our goal is to develop a core curriculum of blended learning for each position in the organization. The training will continue to be aligned with our core competencies, organizational goals, and our values, and it will be progressive in nature to meet the needs of our customers, from the plant floor to the executive suite.” —Robert Webb, senior director, People and Performance, Mohawk Industries, Inc.,