

How to Allot Your Professional Development Dollars

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In the spring of 2021, I spoke with a gentleman who was quite desperate. He called looking for guidance on how best to utilize the \$18,000 LMS (learning management system) his senior leadership had purchased. This purchase occurred BEFORE they had even hired him to head-up their training department! After about a 30-minute conversation in which I ascertained that he had no needs assessments (he didn't know what skills people had, nor what they lacked) or existing curriculum, my advice to him was "the best way to utilize that LMS is to cancel the contract. Tell your management team that the smartest thing you can do this year is save them \$18,000."

Since that conversation I have spoken with a number of AEC organizations about how they are approaching professional development and our conversations have often focused on the technology (and their frustrations with it) rather than on their approaches to development or whether or not their approaches are working.

If you are a small to medium-sized organization (under 1,000 employees) this article is for you. Larger organizations need an LMS because tracking that many employees is too cumbersome otherwise. But sadly, I have seen many smaller companies invest in technology first and their people second. That's like buying a typewriter and presuming it will make you a good writer. You need the fundamentals first. In this case, the fundamentals are establishing what professional development your employees need, determining how to best acquire



that development, and ensuring that people are applying what they've learned. These fundamentals benefit both the individual and the organization.

So, if 2022 is the year you start to focus on developing the future-leaders of your organization through professional development, here are my recommendations for the order in which you should invest.


First, hire a consultant in the field of learning and development. This person will help you to figure out the best way to proceed. He/she will ask you questions about your business goals, help to define priorities for learning that will move the business forward, assess current personnel, and help you to determine if you need to revamp hiring/recruiting practices to achieve your goals. By the end of their

engagement they should be able to provide a recommendation for how you should proceed for the next three to 10 years. This person shouldn't be selling you anything, they should be operating in a strictly advisory role to help you construct a "master plan" that is unique – and beneficial - to your organization.

Next, hire someone to execute the plan. Often an organization will put the responsibility for professional development under the umbrella of HR, but professional development is a unique skill set which most HR people never learn about. And quite frankly, given what's happening in the world of HR these days, they have enough on their plate. This person will be leading the effort, not doing the work – they won't have time to actually be conducting training for you (nor will one person have all the expertise you'll need). What they WILL do is find vendors, negotiate contracts, and ensure that the right people are getting the training they need in the right way. For instance, all 30 of your project managers might need business development training (so you'll bring in a consultant to conduct a two-day training), but your one business development manager will need comprehensive finance training (so you'll send that person out to a program at a local university). Unless you have 400 or more employees, this shouldn't need to be a full-time position at the start.

Thirdly, you'll be investing your dollars in your people. In other words, you have to offer professional development opportunities to your employees. According to Training Magazine's 2020 Training Industry Report, the average company in the U.S. spent \$1,111 per employee per year.

Personally, I find this to be low. I'd suggest \$2,500-3,000 per employee, especially if you are including certifications or PDH in that number. Generally, I categorize professional development as separate (e.g. different budgets) from the technical skills and certifications needed to do the work; one is about compliance while the other is about securing the future of the company. Depending on what needs were determined in step one, there are many economical approaches to offering professional development, such as an "enterprise" subscription to LinkedIn Learning or establishing mentor relationships. You can learn more about these options [in this video](#).

Finally, once you have a plan and a method for executing it, and you have a robust number of employees participating in professional development, you can go ahead and look at utilizing technology to keep track of it all. But ensure you have the fundamentals in place first. 



About the Author

Dr. Nanette Miner is a leadership development and workplace-learning strategy consultant. Through her firm, [The Training Doctor](#), she has revolutionized the way that individuals are prepared for leadership roles in their organizations. Rather than a chosen few, her process is aimed at ensuring everyone in the company has the skills and business acumen of a leader. This approach ensures both immediate and long-term return-on-investment (ROI) for an organization.

She has written articles for *Chief Learning Office magazine*, *Forbes*, and *MBA World* and is a frequent guest on workplace training and career podcasts and talk radio such as *Inc. Radio* and *America's Workforce Radio*.

Nanette regularly speaks at industry conferences and corporate learning events on how to integrate leadership capabilities throughout an organization. An author of eight books, her most recent is *Future-Proofing Your Organization*.

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