



Acquire the Skills to Make Your Organization a Success

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My first corporate world experience lasted nearly 10 years as I rose from Controller to Vice President – Finance. During that time, my employer grew by some six-fold in size. However, despite growth that was sometimes 50% in a year, everything was always calmly in control and never frantic. For example, at 9 AM, I could usually find the company president sitting behind his desk reading the Wall Street Journal with a cup of coffee.

The president's job at that company was not always so relaxed. Two years before my arrival, a line of people would wait outside his door with problems for him to solve when he arrived in the morning. What was the difference? The company invested in four 1-day team-building sessions that helped the company president empower people to make their own decisions.

The team-training class became a standard part of every new manager's first year on the job. That investment in training would pay for itself many times over through an organization where managers held each other accountable and avoided the political maneuvering in which so many organizations engage.

What kind of training does your company need? In his book, ***Small Giants: Companies that Choose to be Great Instead of Big***, Bo Burlingham observes that the greatest compliment that you can pay a company is to call it a "learning organization". Today's strategy maps, derived from Robert Kaplan's ***Balanced Scorecard***, recognize that financial performance begins with organizational learning. Thus, if your organization has not analyzed the knowledge that it needs for the future, there is a good chance that a smarter competitor will leave you in its dust.

Considerable research tells us that people are generally not aware of skills that they do not have. In fact, people who have a very low level of skill in something tend to have a

significantly inflated opinion of their skills, a phenomenon known as the **Dunning-Kruger effect**, named after two professors who studied it. Thus, the only way for a person, or an entire management team, to know how skilled they really are is to benchmark their skills against the outside world. The inevitable result of such an examination is likely to be that you will discover much more that would be useful for you, and the other people in your company, to know.

In his book, **Outliers**, Malcolm Gladwell cites several research studies that reveal that it takes about 10,000 hours to be an expert in anything. Since a work year is about 2,000 hours, you might feel confident right now about your skills if you are more than 5 years out of business school. However, the responsibilities of a financial manager, particularly in a small company, may cover 20-30 major job functions. If you do the math, you will never have enough hours to become an expert in all of them before retirement. Becoming reasonably well informed about that many areas will put you far ahead of your peers.

One knowledgeable person will not make a company strong. Only if your company aspires to be a “learning organization” will it rise among its peers.

How can your company accomplish this? Consider using the society’s staff as a resource. They can help you find seminars on many topics that are far from the traditional CPA society offerings. The society has access to seminars on effective business writing, profitable pricing, and skillful negotiations, just to name a few. Even if you have as few as ten people to train, it may be cost effective to bring the seminar onsite to your own company. Call the onsite training people at your society today to find out what they can do for you!

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