

Leveling up skills equals huge ROI

By Tara Puckey

The necessary skills needed for jobs in every industry are evolving at a rapid pace. While attorneys are familiar with continuing education in the legal field, it may be surprising that some of the “workplace basics” need consistent refreshing as well.

As it stands today, the half-life of a learned skill is just five years, which means that most of what you learned 10 years ago is obsolete, and half of what you learned five years ago is irrelevant. If we’re talking about skills based in technology, those numbers are even lower. In turn, jobs sit empty in almost every field. A study from the National Federation of Independent Businesses said that 45 percent of small businesses were unable to find qualified applicants and 66 percent of jobs are vacant for more than 12 weeks.

Even more telling, employers are finding that the lack of skills isn’t even tied directly to the technical aspects of job performance. A LinkedIn survey showed that 57 percent of employers feel their employees need more development in soft skills than hard skills. Findings by the Stanford Research Institute International and the Carnegie Mellon Foundation determined that 75 percent of long-term job success depends on soft skills mastery and only 25 percent on technical skills.

Pair all that with the fact that the average time spent at a job is now just 4.2 years, and all sides of the workforce – employers and employees – are realizing that it does more for the organization’s bottom line to level up employee skills than to hire. Current staff are already familiar with the basics and are engrained in the culture, cutting the learning curve and building on a foundation of people who have a truly vested interest in the success of the organization and those around them.

So how do employers work to level up the skills of current employees? It all starts with building a culture focused on learning and growth, one that truly demonstrates through action and not just lip service.

Time: Encouraging employees (that’s key) and providing them with time dedicated to learning are quick and easy ways to show you’re committed to helping them grow. Build in time for free webinars; support requests for time off to attend professional development activities; and work to create networking opportunities that benefit you and your staff.

Money: Budget, budget, budget. Early on, set aside funds for employee training so it’s harder to ignore when weighing expenses midyear. Don’t forget to fund association or professional memberships, and be proactive in sharing the benefits with employees (and yourself).

Caution: Don’t assume you know the best way for others to learn. Studies show that information doesn’t stick if people aren’t able to learn based on their own unique styles. Also, don’t forget tenured employees – everyone needs the opportunity to learn, and in-house training can benefit all.

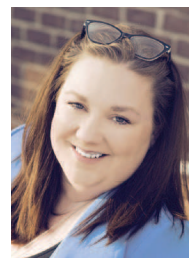
Plan: If you’re not putting new skills to use or creating space for employees to share what they’ve learned, you’re missing out. Bring back new skills and

tools and put them into practice, and find a way to share your new knowledge with others, too.

Once a culture of learning exists, be sure to cover the skills’ “bases” completely. From legal and technical training to essential skills like communication, leadership, critical thinking, listening, adaptability, organization, teamwork and punctuality, a well-rounded employee who is consistently learning more is earning more for the organization. A collaborative study from Boston College, Harvard University and the University of Michigan found that soft-skills training boosts productivity and retention by 12 percent and delivers a 250 percent return on investment. Those are numbers we simply can’t ignore.

So, get it done – build a culture, make a plan and get to learning. The best gift you can give yourself, your employees and, ultimately, your practice is leveling up technical and soft skills with timely training that encourages continued growth. 📈

From AI and technology, to leveling up job skills, to building working relationships and creating environments that focus on employees’ mental wellness, an upcoming Law Practice Management series from ISBA will educate participants on what shifts in the business landscape mean for their firms, their workforce and the future of the legal profession. The “Drivers of Change” series is a four-part mix of live and on-demand courses designed to explore the internal and external factors that are transforming the legal workplace.



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