



# TRAINING

What three companies with different goals and different internal training programs can teach you

By Lucy Webb, Staff Reporter

**F**or many organizations, training can be an albatross. Even if it's not dragging you down, it's often an afterthought.

The thing is, your people are good. Of course, there are things they could still stand to learn — things you yourself could still stand to learn. And maybe you've lost a few people here or there who've left your organization to pursue jobs where they could learn new skills, new facets of your industry.

But who has time to research best practices in training with all that work to do?

Let us jump-start you. We've talked to three companies that are doing their training a little differently — and boiled their lessons down to what your organization can learn from their teaching.

## 1 PA Consulting Group

**NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES:** 3,500 globally, 600 in the U.S.

**HOW THEY TRAIN:** This London-based consulting group, with its U.S. headquarters in

Arlington, has some standard training modules, but, says Julie Davern, head of training and development for PA in the U.S., training is constantly re-evaluated and redeveloped. According to clients' demands.

And this changing strategy is a very real competitive advantage — so much so that Davern won't talk about what training the company's developing now.

A year ago, though, the company was dealing with some big acquisitions, so the training focus shifted somewhat to account management, to help senior executives deal with new clients gained through the acquisitions to build those relationships. Davern says that's been productive; training on account management has helped everyone focus and put those new clients at ease.

There's a training team of roughly 40 people worldwide, but that team works closely with senior-level employees, who in turn deliver much of the training to their colleagues, which provides a certain necessary been-there, done-that component.

And that helps those senior people see the value of succession planning as they strive to get less-senior people working in line with the bigger goals of the organization.

PA seeks feedback on a course-by-course basis; if a training session isn't doing what it's supposed to, it's evaluated and changed — or cut. And Davern's best advice for companies seeking to develop new programs is to look closely — and often — at what skills your organization really needs, and how best to develop those skills within your workforce.

**WHAT YOU CAN LEARN:** Don't be afraid to change what you're doing; in fact, be afraid not to.

Get back to basics in developing training programs.

Get the people who do what you want done to train others how to do it.

If you want your most promising young employees to stick around, teach them how to climb the ladder within your organization.

## 2 Sheppard Mullin

**NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES:** 73 local, 1,029 firm-wide, according to the 2007 Washington Business Journal Book of Lists

**HOW THEY TRAIN:** Law firm Sheppard Mullin offers several unusual lawyer training programs. Perhaps the most unusual is its two-week Business Law Transaction clinic, designed to give summer associates (who are law students) a taste of what the practice of transactional law is like.

D.C. Managing Partner Ed Schiff says he isn't aware of another law firm that has a similar program. Summer associates participate in simulated transactions, acting on behalf of buyers, sellers and lenders. As a result, Sheppard Mullin gets to provide a missing link in the transition from law student to practicing lawyer, Schiff says, and the students get to try something they likely won't experience in law school, where situational training might focus on litigation.

Beyond that, after they've been hired at the firm, young associates have annual seminars, called "Transactional University," to strengthen their knowledge of the practice of transactional law. Associates who've been and three years or more have an opportunity to go to a weekend "Partnership College" to see what it takes to make the jump to partner. And the firm offers

an annual three-day "Marketing College" to educate lawyers in drumming up business — including networking, increasing visibility and knowing what a client's needs are.

**WHAT YOU CAN LEARN:** Let young people — starting with interns — get a real taste of how you do what you do.

Try role-playing what you actually do, in a controlled environment, to enhance your training offerings.

Your people may be the best at what they do, but think about making them better at selling what your organization does.

## 3 EchoDitto

**NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES:** 22

**NOW THEY TRAIN:** There's a bit of a dichotomy in the skills needed by employees of D.C.-based EchoDitto, an online strategy and communications company. Of course, employees need to be aware of new techniques and tools available to them for their technical work. But EchoDitto markets itself as a boutique consulting firm with a "high-touch client focus," says Harish Rao, EchoDitto's CEO, which means the company's 22 employees need to be pretty people-savvy, too. The organization understands that the company's training and its culture will, of necessity, inform each other.

Every year, the company has a retreat, attended by all employees. The first day focuses on team-building, facilitated by people who work within EchoDitto's industry. The second day focuses on sharing and transparency — sharing financials, sharing processes, sharing how the development pipeline works, making everyone aware of what everyone else is doing.

Those values are reinforced on an ongoing basis. Ten percent of employee time is dedicated to projects of the employee's own choosing. When people see outside training they want to attend, in general, it's approved — but employees need to share their learning by blogging about it or presenting it in a meeting and follow-up e-mail. Ten rules that reflect the company's values are distributed to new employees, reviewed regularly, and backed up with positive reinforcement. And every employee is expected to model for other employees.

**WHAT YOU CAN LEARN:** Embrace your culture with your training.

Remember that every day is an oppor-

## Money, train

The Alexandria-based American Society for Training & Development's new state of the industry report says that U.S. organizations spend \$109.25 billion on employee learning annually.

Almost three quarters of that, according to ASTD, is spent on the internal learning function; the rest is spent on outside services. According to the report:

**\$1,424**

The average annual expenditure per employee in the organizations surveyed (large Fortune 500 companies and public-sector organizations) in 2005, an increase of 4 percent from 2004.

**2.2%**

Spending as a percentage of payroll, in 2005.

**41**

The number of hours of learning per employee in 2005.

**36.9%**

of companies used technology to deliver learning.

**24.8%**

of organizations' learning budgets were allocated to external services in 2005, down from 30 percent in 2004.

You can find an executive summary of the report at [www.astd.org/astd/research/research\\_reports](http://www.astd.org/astd/research/research_reports), or buy a printed copy of the full report from the ASTD store. ASTD members have free access to an electronic copy of the report.

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tunity to train those around you — and to learn.

Think about whether allowing some learning to be employee-driven works for you.

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