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Teamwork
Many companies now using
group approach to training.
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Focus: Executive Education

Many companies now leaning toward team-oriented training

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Executive education remains a top choice for firms eager to keep their organizations afloat or thriving in a challenging economic environment.

As opposed to an emphasis on generic, one-size-fits-all pro-grams, in recessionary times, increasing numbers of companies are seeking a more customized approach, says D. Kevin Berchelmann, president and principal of Houston-based Triangle Performance LLC.

“While there’s some good stuff out there, I think, lately, we’re seeing a lot more interest from organizations in something specific and more applicable to them directly,” he says.

Berchelmann founded Triangle Performance in 2000. His clients include mid-sized companies to Fortune 100 firms in manufacturing, energy, industrial services and construction.

He says firms are finding that a team approach to learning yields better results than sending an occasional one-off executive to a program.

“There’s a huge value to an executive team sitting in a room,” he says. “When that occurs, there’s learning, but more importantly, they learn as a group. It’s burned into their memory as a group and they discuss as a group.”

It also gives executives an opportunity to talk about things they don’t normally discuss, says Berchelmann, who himself worked as an executive at the vice president level or above for nearly a dozen years prior to starting his firm.

Firms today are expressing greater interest in discussing tactical topics such as cost-saving initiatives.

“There’s more of a discussion on dollars than in the past,” Berchelmann says. “That’s one of the reasons company-specific is a little more valuable than the generic stuff.”

Also in the past, Berchelmann says, companies were more comfortable with people learning on the job time.

“More successful companies are realizing that if they expect their leadership team to perform well, they need the requisite skills to do those things now, and not two years from now,” he says.

Leadership skills that he tends to focus on are coaching and developing, negotiating and conflict resolution.

This month, Berchelmann was at the



Cedar Rapids, Iowa, plant of client Archer Daniels Midland, a Fortune 50 company involved in agriculture and ethanol production.

Christine Helle, a director of human relations for Archer Daniels Midland, says she discovered Berchelmann via the Internet a few years ago.

“We’ve got a number of executives who grew up in the plant and while very focused on production, they were lacking leadership skills such as mentoring and coaching others,” Helle says. “So I went out and started looking for some help in this area.”

Indeed, another trend in executive education, according to Berchelmann, is a renewed emphasis on discussions around empowering people and more effectively delegating.

“Companies are discovering that they have to expand executives’ reach by effectively delegating more to junior

leaders and junior staff,” he says. “It’s now turning into something mission critical.”

Part of what Berchelmann does for Archer Daniels Midland, Helle says, is teaching executives to develop leaders within the organization.

“We were missing some key components in succession planning and getting people ready to move to the next level,” she says.

Since Berchelmann began offering his services, the responses and changes in her company’s executives has been “amazing” and the company has become more efficient, according to Helle.

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Kevin Berchelmann
Triangle Performance LLC.

“They’ve done a complete 180,” she says. “People are talking the same language now, delegating more and communications that were before one-way are now two-way.”

Her job, she says, has become easier because her need to deal with “people issues” has lessened.

Berchelmann believes the key to his approach is that it involves more than just an event, such as a week-long retreat.

“It’s a process,” he says. “I engage with them over the course of months or a year. We get together to do some skills, talk about it, they leave and have a chance for application and testing, then we talk about it some more before we introduce something newer.”

He adds: “It’s different than sitting your butt in a chair for a week.”

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