

Focal Point |

Scalable, Nimble Upskilling Options...



1 Build Up and Coordinate Peer-To-Peer Learning: get your arms around the collective skill sets ready to share within your organization, define proficiency levels for the most-needed skills, and match up peers based on their professional needs and expressed wishes. Peer-to-peer collaborations create highly interactive, lower-risk learning environments that can be scaled up as needed to fill the gap. While less formal in structure by nature, this option can be less intimidating for some learners. Also, a foundation of mutual exchange helps teachers to become students and vice versa.

Develop a practical way to understand the skills your team possesses in-house (like surveys or proficiency tests) and store this valuable information in a database (for easy match-up reference but also to create a learning proficiency baseline to measure future skills cultivation). Also, be careful to make sure the compatibility, some may say chemistry, amongst peers is there. If it's not, don't force it. Move on and try another pairing.

Example: Maintenance Lead teaches Line Supervisor most efficient and effective machine set-up configurations for production line changes.

2 Create a New Business Venture or New Revenue Incubator: designate a SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-based) goal and assemble a cross-functional team with entrepreneurial potential to design, develop, and test new products and services. Perhaps, this start-up endeavor will be set up in addition to your more traditional research & development, engineering, and innovation functions.

Experience tells us the team should report challenges and successes to an executive group to ensure progress is being made (and expected lessons are being learned).

Example: A newly-created digital team is tasked with developing cloud-based software services (SaaS) to extend customer satisfaction and boost demand for the firm's core manufactured products.

3 Develop On-Demand Computer-Based Training (CBT): forecast skills gaps over the next year or two and put together on-demand, interactive, computer-based training vignettes tied to tangible work performance to help close the gaps.

CBT can be developed in modules and easily updated as new knowledge unfolds. Learning sessions can be scheduled amongst other job responsibilities, too. This educational media is only limited by your creativity, and alas, your budget.

Example: Animated virtual reality videos showing the inner workings of a SAG (semi-autogenous grinding) mill provides "if-then" scenarios for mill control room parameters needed to adjust for maximum performance.

4 Reorient Your Training Team: rather than rely on high-level, generalized concepts, make sure your training team provides very specific, tangible content and practitioner-generated learning applications in the training repertoire, too. Isolate specific skills that will make the most positive impact to your business and encourage your training team to design and deploy a concentrated, focused upskilling program to meet the business needs (including specific learning objectives, educational design, content media selection, training cadence, on-the-job applications, and skills gap impact / effectiveness measurement criteria). Get the training team heavily involved in bolstering the skill sets your employees need today – and what you expect they will need down the line.

Example: Media training team primarily engaged in onboarding and general concept sharing incorporates new sales program into their repertoire - including omnichannel presentations, client role-playing, sales coaching techniques, and conducting sales key performance indicator analysis.

5 Partner with Junior Colleges, Technical Schools, and Local Universities: collaborate with local universities, junior colleges, and technical schools to offer coursework or even co-develop a program to supplement on-the-job training. Schools are also competing for students and are actively looking for ways to positively impact local economies, develop stronger ties with businesses, encourage employers to hire their graduates, and find ways to develop more advanced internship programs connecting academia with future business needs.

Example: Capital goods manufacturer partners with technical school two miles down the road to create beginner-to-advanced welding curriculum for new hires.

6 Hire Outside Help: perhaps your organization does not have the specific skill sets, collective experience, or even time to put together an organic training program, facilitate all the sessions, keep up with fluctuating training populations, and update the skills programs as business dictates. No doubt, there are several permutations and intervening variables housed within skills development for any organization. Hire somebody to help you. Expertise may be in the form of consultants, dedicated training firms, or even specific industry experts. Make sure your partner understands your firm is interested in building up the concentration of skills within the organization but is also expecting long-term internal capability build-up to further upskilling momentum in the future. It bears worth repeating that skills development is a series of moving targets and, therefore, an on-going challenge.

Example: Consumer products firm hires consulting company to transform their team of buyers into a more professionalized strategic sourcing department.

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7 Leverage Free Educational Content and Resources: this option depends on the skills gaps in question. It's selection calls for a very clear vision of what's to be accomplished and warrants a crisp organizer to make sure the chosen, curated content flows together and is worthy of your team's time. Having said this, there's copious online training and it's a shame so many folks are unaware of all the mind-expanding lessons out there just waiting for the download. LinkedIn and YouTube training videos, TED Talks, university podcasts, and so many more content sources are available to chip away at skills deficits. For this option, you will need to have a strong vision for what skills need to be punched up, the type of media that resonates with your employees, and then employ a sharp-witted curator to decide what makes the cut and what's a waste of time. There's an expanse of frivolity out there amongst worthy educational content that will need a good sifting before your prescribed pathway is visible.

Example: Private Equity firm learns how to create investment case studies and promotional marketing videos through online training content.

8 Encourage Time at Volunteer Organizations: skills such as project management, problem-solving, team collaboration, and public speaking can be sharpened while applying your team's energy to a cause near and dear to your organization's heart. Most likely, you will need to put some guideposts in place for the myriad of volunteer opportunities to truly align with skills needing stronger cultivation. Yet, opportunity abounds in non-profits to sharpen skills with only a part-time commitment – all while getting some good graces accomplished as well.

Example: Accounting firm encourages team members to help an animal rescue organization develop and implement fund-raising events.

9 Build Skills Requirements Into Mentoring Programs: make the interaction more than just talking about "when I was in your position" by outlining specific skills to be transferred from mentor to mentee (and mentee to mentor, for that matter). All parties need to agree with the mutual exchange of lessons learned and be willing to put some time into working on tangible activities to get the knowledge transference done. Like the aforementioned peer-to-peer training option, mentoring programs are only as strong as the chemistry and commitment between the collaborating parties. So, you will have to keep an eye out for folks just ticking an administrative box rather than earnestly investing in another person's success.

Example: Division President brings Sales VP into Board Meeting to present quarterly performance and outline new product launch.

10 Set Up a Round Robin Learning Format: your organization may have knowledge transfer opportunities across departments or divisions. With a little planning and lots of coordination, your team members can help to train each other via preplanned, consistent immersion into other parts of the organization or departmental specialties. Figure out who possesses the skills you want to build up, set up a program to showcase those skills at the point of execution, and encourage interaction amongst the skilled and the aspirants. Make sure to track the program's expediency and effectiveness; after all, the team is not merely on a field trip. Chances are in your favor this round robin type of educational structure also cross-pollinates professional interests across the firm, too.

Example: Aerospace marketers spend time in Engineering department to understand research and development of new product.

11 Allocate a Creative Time Weekly Percentage – Special Projects Outside of "Day Job": most of us admire 3M and Google policies laying aside time to work on other projects outside of day-to-day responsibilities. This not only provides the chance for innovation but also gives employees leeway to get outside of their normal capabilities and stretch a bit. (Not to mention, this level of autonomy does wonders for employee engagement.) The more successful firms providing this type of creative time ensure there's competition amongst the team around project progress and some visibility on how time is being spent. In addition to challenging the team members on the project, this enhances your firm's chances to make a positive impact on new products and services offerings, internal work processes, or even customer satisfaction enhancements.

Example: Energy Services company shepherds internal team to develop internally-generated new service offerings in untapped industry verticals.

12 Get Tech Partners Involved: the off-the-shelf software you are paying for may also have some built-in employee training time, too. While this avenue is usually more focused on specific technology services being provided, it's a great way to develop highly-skilled systems advocates or power users within your own firm. You're paying for it; so, your team might as well get the full benefits of the investment. If you ask nicely, your partner may even spring for lunch to go along with the learning.

Example: SaaS CRM provider offers data analytics interpretation, outbound marketing research, and software training to Sales & Marketing team.