

TWELVE UPSKILLING ACCELERANTS

Several practical ways to encourage continuous learning within your team



BUILD UP AND COORDINATE PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING

1

Get your arms around needed near-term and long-term skill sets, define proficiency levels for the most impactful 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 gaps. 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 tangible way to understand the skills your team possesses in-house (like surveys or proficiency tests) and store this valuable information in a database (for easier match-up references but also to create learning proficiency baselines to measure future skills cultivation). 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.




CREATE A 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.

2

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 new, multidisciplinary team is formed and tasked with developing cloud-based services (SaaS) to extend customer satisfaction, add an additional revenue stream, and boost demand for the firm's core manufactured products.




DEVELOP ON-DEMAND COMPUTER-BASED TRAINING (CBT)

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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.





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REORIENT YOUR TRAINING TEAM

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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. 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 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 your in-house training team heavily involved in bolstering 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 outreach to prospects, client relationship role playing, sales coaching techniques, and applying sales metrics analysis.

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.

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HIRE OUTSIDE HELP

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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 continuously update skills programs. Hire somebody to help. Expertise may be in the form of consultants, dedicated training firms, or even specific industry experts. Make sure your skills training partner understands your firm is interested in building up the concentration of skills, and, is also expecting long-term internal capability build-up to further future upskilling (training the trainer). Skills development is tied to shifting business objectives coupled with your team's undulating, collective educational & professional experiences. Therefore, it will always be an on-going challenge.

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



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LEVERAGE FREE EDUCATIONAL CONTENT AND RESOURCES

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This option depends on the skills gaps in question. Its 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 and the type of media that resonates with your employees. Then, employ a disciplined 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 on behalf of your team.

Example | Private Equity firm learns how to create portfolio firm investment case studies, blog posts, and promotional marketing videos through "how to" online training content

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 on the mutual exchange of lessons learned and be willing to put some time into working on tangible, knowledge transference activities. 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 prepares promising Sales Manager to present quarterly performance and outline new product launch in next board meeting.

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ENCOURAGE TIME IN VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS

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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 amongst the myriad of volunteer opportunities to align volunteering with skills needing stronger cultivation within your business. Opportunity abounds in non-profits to sharpen skills with a part-time commitment – all while getting some good deeds accomplished.

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





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SET UP A ROUND ROBIN LEARNING FORMAT

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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 and relationships across the firm, too.

Example | Aerospace marketers spend time in Engineering to understand the research and development process of new product.

ALLOCATE CREATIVE TIME AS WEEKLY PERCENTAGE FOR SPECIAL PROJECTS OUTSIDE OF "DAY JOB"



Most of us admire 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 normal capacities and stretch a bit. (Not to mention, this level of autonomy boosts employee engagement.) The more successful firms providing this type of creative time ensure there's friendly competition amongst the team around project progress and some visibility on how time is being spent. In addition to challenging team members on the project, this policy could enhance your firm's chances to make a positive impact on new products and services offerings, internal work processes, or even customer satisfaction enhancements.

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Example | Technology company sets aside 10% of paid work hours - allowing developers and engineers to work on projects outside of day-to-day responsibilities.



GET TECH PARTNERS INVOLVED

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The off-the-shelf software your organization is 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 in-house. Your firm is paying; 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 (the timeless Lunch and Learn).

Example | Marketing automation & CRM services provider educates their customer's sales & marketing team on data analytics interpretation, outbound marketing effectiveness research, and software training best practices.

