

The Value of Cross Training in an Organization

by Jayne Boucherle

As technology and job responsibilities become more complex, many organizations find it difficult to have someone cover for another's job should an illness or accident occur. Cross training of some tasks can benefit every organization. My experience with the value of cross training began in the 1980's with a Fortune 100 company in the physical security industry.

I was hired as an Administrative Assistant where paperwork was getting out of control and processes were not defined to get the right information to the right person at the right time. Keep in mind that in the early 80's there was a great deal of manual input on forms, and in this case information needed to be sent to an office or accounting center in another state. The Internet was not yet born. How many of you remember that time in your lives?

All 5 departments had its own secretary. These positions would now report to me. Some of you can undoubtedly relate to what that challenge was like! It was important that I gained an understanding of the job responsibilities of each staff position. I didn't have to know every detail but just enough to understand the paperwork flow and what needed to be done to get the departments working together. How did I begin?

At this particular office, a procedure had to be put into place to ensure all phones were covered, thus the days of everyone taking off for lunch at the same time and leaving management to answer phones came to an end. You can imagine how well that went over. This was a mini step to my ultimate goal. Once everyone got over that hurdle, it became evident that idle time could be better used and cross training was accepted. I also pitched in during vacations when and where I could. So here is what resulted.

Along with keeping the workflow in the departments moving, what really evolved from cross training was understanding the challenges each position dealt with and everyone came to realize how their own work and attitudes affected other departments. We all learned that we approached situations differently and our natural tendencies or behavior characteristics caused us to react in different ways. Some of the office drama disappeared once everyone realized this was more of a team effort. Things were taken less personal because we knew what made the other person tick. Eventually the staff took it upon themselves to check with one another when they were available to help. This didn't happen overnight, but it is possible. Here comes my plug for DiSC assessments.

Had I known back then what these assessments were all about, it could have prevented a great deal of stress in getting past some of the things that were keeping people from working better together. Understanding the people you work with, and learning to accept and work with their different approaches to tasks enables organizations to experience greater productivity and less turnover. A culture of cross training forces individuals to learn to work together, and cross training will improve performance and fitness for your organization. If you would like more information on cross training and how DiSC assessments can help your organization, send your contact information to jayne@matterhornconsulting.com. I would welcome the opportunity to tell you more.