

## Getting Managers Engaged in Learning

Jeanne C. Meister

---

How important is it to get managers and executives personally involved in employee development programs? In an era when learning executives are under pressure to align their organizations with overall business objectives and to demonstrate value to the executive suite, one way to make this happen is to let management experience firsthand what's going on.

For JetBlue, one consequence of rapid success was the need to promote middle managers quickly. The result: inexperienced leaders prone to problems both subtle (favoritism) and not-so-subtle (new managers acting, in the words of CEO David Neeleman, like "little dictators"). The answer for JetBlue was a manager-led leadership development program. Senior leaders of the company are now actively involved in the program, trained in how to be facilitators, and how to share their stories and leadership strategies with their younger colleagues to help guide them.

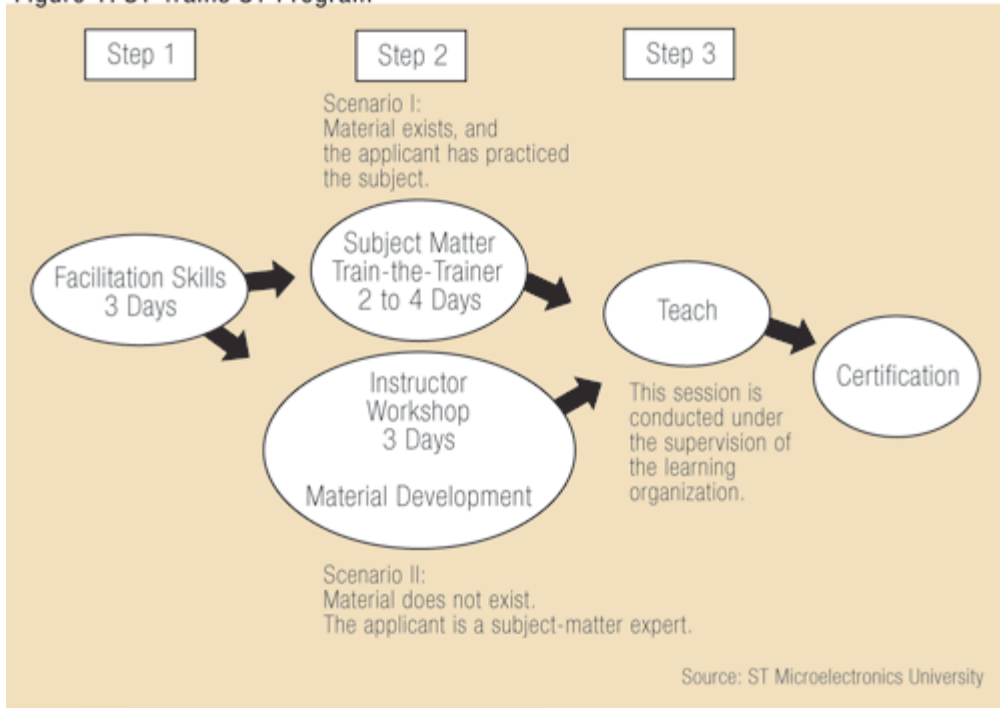
What were some keys to the success of the program? Starting with the evidence is always a good idea. Michael Barger, chief learning officer of JetBlue, said that his team made use of the company's annual "corporate climate study." Barger explained, "That study highlighted the need to develop formal tools necessary for newly appointed leaders to succeed." A clear business goal is also important. As Barger noted, commitment to developing the manager-led program at JetBlue was driven by management's desire to create the same level of service in the airline industry that companies like Ritz-Carlton have created in the hotel industry.

Think the executive team will resist your efforts? Learning executives are not always aware of the high value placed on education in their organizations. Accenture's "High Performance Workforce Study" consistently points out that learning is highly prized. About one in five CEOs and COOs rate training and development as one of the top three most important functions within their organizations. In fact, C-level executives are more than twice as likely as HR executives to rate learning and development as a top-three function. That is amazing: As HR and learning professionals, we are less inclined than the CEO to value our potential to drive revenue and change within the organization.

Very few people are "naturally" good teachers and facilitators, and it's important to bear that in mind. One ideal process for turning business leaders into good teachers is demonstrated by ST Microelectronics, whose "ST Trains ST" program has a successful track record of providing basic teaching skills to all ST managers. Figure 1 illustrates the three-step process of the "ST Trains ST" program. In the first step, managers work on their classroom facilitation skills. In the second step, they receive guidelines for teaching an existing course or instructional design support for developing a new one. Finally, they conduct a

session under ST University supervision and guidance. Upon successful completion of all three steps, the managers receive ST University certification.

Figure 1: ST Trains ST Program



As these companies are finding, participation of senior leadership in corporate learning is another way to keep the learning organization and the business in synch. Certainly companies need some formal structures in place to make alignment successful: planning processes and demand forecasts, formal communications plans and effective governance. But in addition to these structures, it helps to have active, participating executives on your learning team.

*Jeanne C. Meister is vice president of market development at Accenture Learning. Comments on this article can be sent to Jeanne at [jmeister@clomedia.com](mailto:jmeister@clomedia.com).*

[November 2004 Table of Contents](#)

---

copyright 2002 - CLOmedia.com / Chief Learning Officer Magazine - MediaTec Publishing

Chief Learning Officer Magazine  
<http://www.clomedia.com/>