

The ACTIV²E Leadership Model, Part 3

Training

Skills development and leadership development education are so vitally important. People will not be effective in an organization if they don't know what they are supposed to do or why they are supposed to do it.

Training focuses on developing skills and education focuses on application, synthesis, and valuing. Education helps members to use the skills they've learned. Education instills the value in the training. That said, for the purpose of this discussion, training and education will simply be referred to as training.

Why Train?

It's an elementary question, but worth the discussion. Think about a time when you wanted to do something – fix your car, learn a language, or even program your DVD player – and you didn't know what you were doing or even where to begin. What did you do? You looked for direction – a person, book, or other method that could tell you how to complete the task. But, what if you couldn't find who or what you needed? What if you couldn't understand the instructions? It could get pretty sticky.

Of course, the same is true for the work environment. Yet often the focus is on operations and production; training that allows for optimum production/operations tempo is ignored or underutilized. When new members come to the organization (or to a different job within the organization) they have no idea which end is up. For most, their only desire is to be successful at their job and further the goals of the organization, but they need guidance as to how they can best contribute.

We, the more experienced members of the organization – whether we are bosses or peers – have an obligation to give our fellow members the direction and tools they need to succeed. Part of leadership, whether we are in a formal leadership position or not, is to be part of that training process.

An organization's training programs are active training programs. That is, members participating in the training programs play active roles; they are expected to demonstrate proficiency. The people who administer, manage, and make decisions about whether to have training programs also take active roles, acting as advocates and advisors, as well as administrators.

Advocates, Advisors, and Administrators

What is the true role of a leader in the training process? They have three distinct, yet overlapping roles: advocates, advisors, and administrators. Leaders who are successful at these

roles are the keystones to effective training programs, and effective training programs in turn make the organization better prepared to accomplish its mission or goals.

Leaders as Advocates

As a leader, your first job is to be the advocate of training programs offered by the organization, and to suggest new training programs where needed. You are a role model: you must sell it, and you must believe in it. It's your job to show the value of training to your members and to your bosses.

Your role as an advocate is especially important for new members of your team to see. Your enthusiasm for the program and how you model the program yourself through the training in which you participate are keys to the new members' forming their impressions of training within the organization. If you succeed, they will learn to appreciate and properly use the training programs to make them more effective for you. What are some of the ways you can do this?

Ensure the quality of training (skills development training and education) in your department.

Become an expert at the system of training programs development, offerings, and student selection within your organization. The squadron or wing Professional Development Office is a great place to begin.

Ensuring the quality of training in your organization is extremely important. This is especially true of the member's first training experience with the organization, in our case Level I for adult members or the Curry achievement in the Cadet Program. Their first experience with an organization's training philosophy and structure kind of sets the culture for the rest of the organization. If their initial training is done less than professionally, as a side note rather than a highlight of their first days with you, their impression of the organization's overall program will be negative. They may not think critically about training and may miss key points in the training they do take. If the training is done with professionalism and with purpose their attitude will be more positive.

By the way, professional training programs don't take a lot of money, but they do take a lot of dedication and purpose. That's why your role as an advocate is so important.

Advocate your organization's training programs by participating in them yourself.

Members look to you for guidance. You must show them you "walk the talk" by progressing in your own professional development. You'll become a better leader, and you'll be making a LOUD statement that training is important.

Leaders as Advisors

In your role as an advisor you are active in the development of your members. Members, especially new ones, may not know about all the opportunities available to them. You can make their lives a lot easier by *actively* helping them keep track of what's available. A few thoughts:

Learn the skills and preferences of your members.

Do your members have special skills you can use? Are they taking classes for fun that can be put to use by the organization?

Learn about what they would like to do.

Though you may not be able to meet their exact needs, you can show them that you consider their preferences when making assignments and selections.

Know what training they've already taken with the organization, if any.

At the same time, find out what they need to do to progress. Sometimes your members will not keep up to date on their self-checks, but their training must still be current, and they should be training for their next job with the organization as well.

This brings up an important point. Training should not just be used to keep someone current in the job they have. Training should also be an investment in their future with the organization: for their next job or promotion. Training for the future as well as the present gives the organization a better prepared pool of candidates from which to choose.

Arrange to sit down with your members in a formal session twice per year.

The session doesn't have to be a long one. When you do sit down with your members, review their records with them, review what training (inside and outside of the organization) they've taken during the previous six months, and talk about the perceptions of their training. Ask them what they want out of training and professional development over the next six months, share with them your expectations, and help them plan their next six months in the organization.

Be available for them when they wish.

It seems simple enough, but it's often overlooked. A couple of quality minutes on the fly can tell you a lot.

Post and encourage participation in organizational training activities.

This is an area where your roles as an advocate and an advisor overlap. As an advisor you keep your members informed of the training activities they need to progress. As an advocate, you show them the value in training, the "sell" job.

Leaders as Administrators

Your members deserve to have their training files accurate, training requests processed quickly, and their education documented.

As a leader, you also need to properly resource the training, that is, give it the money and time to be effective. If you don't make that decision, advocate proper resourcing to the people in your organization who budget. Often, training budgets are among the first cut. While doing so may temporarily relieve short-term budget problems, it does long-term harm to the organization because it sacrifices long-term readiness.

Putting it Together

Each role you play as a leader with regard to training is important. These roles must be performed in harmony so your members get the most out of training opportunities available, and your organization can effectively do what it was designed to do.

Why so much emphasis? Now more than ever, training is integral to the success of organizations. Most all organizations have access to similar technology. The areas where companies differentiate now is in the talent – and in the training.

The Increasing Importance of Training

It seems as if just as it's getting harder to find adequate resources to train, the more critical training becomes. Consider this example:

In 1974, Emergency Locator Transmitters, or ELTs (a device installed in an aircraft or boat, and when activated by a crash, hard landing or immersion in water sends a homing signal to authorities) were just beginning to see wide use, and most private aircraft did not carry them. Since finding downed aircraft without an ELT was a featured mission of CAP's search and rescue capability, aircraft crew members (scanners and observers) would look out the window to try to see the wreckage. The skill set involved for scanners and observers was more physical, less technical.

Nowadays, it's a different story. ELTs are required in all general aviation aircraft, and the tools used to find these aircraft, including global positioning and other electronic aids, require aircrew members to be proficient in a wider skill set. In addition, the role of aircraft in emergency services has broadened as well, with the advent of the homeland security mission and the expansion of the disaster relief mission.

To that end, CAP has spent a large amount of money making sure that members know how and why they are doing what they are doing. For CAP, it's a matter of life and death.

And, emergency services is not the only area. All missions of CAP have undergone the same transformation. Now more than ever before, the mission of CAP requires its members to be educated in the roles and obligations of CAP, as well as in topics such as management, leadership, values, and communication. It also requires its volunteer members to be proficient in a wide variety of skills, many of them highly technical.

Technology has provided CAP and the members with the ability to do more, communicate more quickly and more freely, and compete on the same level as their peers. To take advantage of the

opportunities technology gives us; we must master the technology, and integrate that technology into the mission. As important, we must also tell our members why what we are doing is important, and how it contributes to the success of the mission. This is the complimentary relationship between “training” and “education”.

Your job as a leader is to instill in your members the desire to learn, show them the value of the process, and provide quality opportunities to learn. The mission/goal will not be achieved without training, and members will not stay with you if they don't feel they can do what they've been asked to do. If you as the leader believe that training is central to accomplishing the mission, and central to the life of the organization and you provide opportunities to learn, your members will believe it as well.

Notes

1. Civil Air Patrol 2010 CAP Financial Statement