

Training for Life Skills.

Prez Sez 10-2006, by Dr. Lew Ireland

Change is inevitable; progress is optional. Anon.

Education and training are often interchanged as synonymous words that mean the same. It is often confusing to mix up the two. Education is typically that knowledge acquired through a formal school environment to give a person an understanding of a subject or subjects. Education does not provide the hands-on skills to accomplish tasks.

Training, on the other hand, is a mixture of knowledge and skills. Vendors provide training in different subjects for the purpose of changing behavior – which may be adding to the skill sets or replacing existing skill sets for a specific purpose. Training is typically limited in scope and close ended. Effective training, therefore, should provide individuals or teams new knowledge and skills to enhance their capabilities.

JC Consultancy has been working with *asapm* to prepare individuals for the Level D – Certified Project Practitioner examination. The primary audience has been architects and engineers – those individuals who often work on projects, but are educated in the physical sciences of their respective professions. These individuals are required to work on projects and contribute to the success of project without the benefit of formal training in project management. The training provided by JC Consultancy gives these individuals the knowledge and skills to better perform in projects, whether as a project manager or a member of the project team.

A recent review of the knowledge and skill levels in project management raises the question are these skills only applicable to projects. Many will agree that the practices and techniques used in projects are useful for both personal and professional functions. Some examples of useful functions are listed below.:

- Planning. Developing and implementing skills to create a workable plan
 - Creating a plan for a vacation with goals and the consumption of resources. Laying out the time frame for the vacation and the activities that will be conducted. Estimating the cost and use of such items as the family car are important.
 - Seeking a new job requires planning and the effective scheduling of activities. Preparing a resume and conducting research on potential employers could be parts of the plan.
 - Moving to a new office could use project techniques to plan, implement, and control the sequence of events that must occur.
- Cost or Price. Daily activities often require cost estimating and cost analysis. Sometime cost (or price) is involved in such routine items as purchasing lunch. The question may be where is the best value.
 - Buying an automobile is a cost estimating process that has consequences if the wrong choice is made. It may be a choice between two or more brands of automobile or it may be a choice of type within a brand. The prices of gasoline may be a consideration for life-cycle cost of ownership, i.e., the total cost of ownership, which includes operating cost, maintenance cost, and insurance cost.
 - Home repair or home improvement. The cost of home maintenance or improvement is often a matter of product, performance, and price. One needs to have proposals that include all three items to analyze and determine which is the best value. Price alone does not give the best value.
- Technical Assessments. Evaluating the technical characteristics of a product or service may be a random process. It, however, should be an informed decision when selecting goods and services.

Selections made based on brand alone or reputation of the provider may or may not be the most appropriate choice.

- Selecting a product should use the project management principles to evaluate the attributes in a formal process. Questions such as does the product meet the need, will the product last with or without maintenance for the required period, and does the product have other uses may be part of the selection criteria.
- Selecting a service should use project management principles to evaluate the scope of work and whether it meets your requirements. Questions such as will the work be performed at a time and frequency of your choosing may be part of the selection criteria.
- Risk Assessment. Evaluating the level of risk associated with any business or personal decision can be supported using the principles of project management. First, the decision must have a goal or outcome from which to measure the effectiveness of the action.
 - Reducing risk of home buying through an inspection process conducted by a reputable surveyor to determine if there are structural defects.
 - Assessing risk of purchasing a used automobile that may have been in accidents or has a history of frequent breakdowns, which can lead to additional cost of operation.
 - Assessing the risk of employing a “cheap” contractor to remodel your house rather than an established, but more costly contractor.

The prior examples of the use of project management techniques can improve ones ability to obtain grater value for the money spent and lessen the probability of incurring a greater cost for ownership of a product. Decisions are made each day that can be condensed into three Ps – Product, Performance, and Price.

- Evaluating the product to determine whether it meets the needs of all the stakeholders, e.g., spouse, children, and self. There may be other stakeholders such as neighbors, associates, and governmental agencies.
- Performance involves any service that comes with the product such as installation of product, service on the product, or warranty. Performance is typically “does the seller commit to meeting certain criteria and will he or she meet that criteria.” The performance criteria are typically part of a contract.
- Considering the product and its functionality to meet the needs of the stakeholder and the promised performance, is the price fair in comparison with other offerings. The lowest price may not be the best value considering all other factors.

This brief analysis of some of the knowledge and skills learned in project management are really life skills that can improve the quality of life by obtaining the best value for your money and reducing disappointment with purchased products and services. These life skills can be used almost daily to change from an emotional selection of a product to a structured process that recognizes value in products.

Training in project management techniques, therefore, gives double returns. First, it prepares one to work in a project environment and, second, it prepares one as an informed buyer of products and services. The professional side of ones career can be either complemented with additional knowledge and skills to be a top performer in a project environment while the personal side of life is positively changed to give an opportunity to enhance the quality of life.

In summary, project management knowledge and skills are career-enhancing capabilities that improve job performance and change daily personal decision-making habits to give more from available finances. Training in project management can have major implications for your career and your life.