

Mission Ready

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Is "Street Smart" Training Diminishing Your Corporate Policy?

On its face, one would think “street smart” training, i.e. training that prepares one’s employees for the actual challenges to be met in the marketplace, would be a good thing. But, so often, company trainers unwittingly diminish the importance of following company policy, by demonstrating the “street smart” way of getting around an obstacle. Incredibly, doing things “the company way,” is often presented only as an option. A company trainer will invariably present the “official” procedure—with all of the time consuming checks and balances inherent in the formal company policy—then, as if caught up in a moment of confidentiality among peers, reveal the shortcuts to really get things done in today’s fast paced business environment. He or she has, in effect, offered two choices: the company way, or the street smart way. Not surprisingly, the new hires in the room, who may already be predisposed to “thinking out of the box,” nod in affirmation.

We believe it is safe to say that very many employees view company policy as an obstacle to getting things done. Further, the older the company, the more irrelevant the policy is deemed, in the mind of the employee. What, they wonder, can the corporate patriarchs—who did business in the days before the Internet and smart phones, and who worked for only one company their entire careers—have to teach the modern, savvy, professional? The idea that the dusty company manual could be a time saving resource that will protect the employee from having to reinvent the wheel, does not occur to many trainees, because company policy is rarely presented in that light. When company policy is considered a hindrance to getting something done, the very mistakes the policy was created to avoid—

including those leading inevitably to ethical crises—are sure to be made again.

Compare the “corporate way” to the “Marine Corps way.” A Drill Instructor doesn’t first present the official procedure to his/her recruits—and then follow with the “street smart” way of getting things done. The DI teaches “by the book,” because the “book” has been written, in many places, with the blood of Marines on the battlefield. The DI wants his/her recruits to benefit from past experience, not ignore it.

Are the readers of Mission Ready confident that their employees have even read their company policy manual, much less understand and follow it? If not, can part of the problem be that the corporate manual is something produced by the HR and Legal Departments, and reads like a set of government specifications? Furthermore, does the manual simply dictate, or does it explain the compelling reasons behind corporate policy?

If you think your Company Policy Manual could use some help, please contact us. We may be able to transform that dusty document, from a series of Thou Shalt Nots, into a highly readable resource that your employees will refer to, time and again. A Company Policy Manual should not be looked upon only as a shield against litigation; it should be a virtual coach, ready to help your employees in their decision-making, and ready to keep them—and you—out of trouble.

Wouldn’t it be wonderful to feel confident that your employees understand and follow corporate policy?