

COLUMN: As The Saws Turn

TITLE: Training: The Real Reality Show

Since we started our company four years ago, my partner and I have made the effort at least several times a year to do company-wide training. The subject of the training has ranged from mastering our internal processes to customer-supplier relationships to client service awareness.

We have always made an effort to use some of the most respected training methods, with the latest in training materials we could find on the specific topic we were tackling.

This year we did something completely different. Rather than spend an eight-hour day lecturing and writing on easels and taping papers all over the walls of the meeting room, we tried a completely different approach. We still had the same goals in mind: review our internal processes and create more awareness for what each part of the company does. But we didn't want to use the same method of delivering that message. Instead, we entered the world of the reality show.

What in the past had been a long day of listening on the part of the meeting attendees (our employees) became a fully participative mixture of Survivor, Fear Factor and Weakest Link. There was very little lecturing and even less writing on easels. There was a whole lot of team-building, friendly competition and exposure to what their peers did for the company.

Employees were divided into four teams. Teams were made up of people from all parts of the company – sales, account management, project management, production, accounting, etc – and the teams remained together for the entire day.

After a few short team-building exercises, including each team choosing a name for itself, the challenges began.

The concept was to give everyone a chance to “walk in the other person’s moccasins” – to see what it was like to do the jobs of those in other parts of the company. We had production and project management staff making cold calls. We had salespeople inbounding exhibits. We had account management staff designing an exhibit and we had accounting staff booking freight and planning show service logistics.

Each of four exercises were set up as a competition between the teams and each person on each team had a chance to participate in each of the exercises. We scored each event and awarded each events winner a prize, and kept a running tally of scores for a grand prize.

Watching the fear rise on the faces of people when they realized that, yes, they were actually going to make a cold call was surpassed only by their thrill of connecting with the prospect and actually having a conversation. They all agreed that they wouldn’t want to do it for a living, and in the process gained a new appreciation for just one of the facets of being a salesperson.

The challenge of creating the transportation logistics plan for sending four identical exhibits to 28 events in 30 days in cities all over the country produced a whole new appreciation for what the account management team deals with on a daily basis. The design/estimating and production exercises were equally challenging and equally enlightening for the participants.

The day ended with a ‘what did we learn today’ discussion, and then a celebration of their completion of all the events. The overriding result was that our employees have a new appreciation for what each other does for the company, and, perhaps more importantly, a sharpened appreciation for how

important their own role is in the grand scheme of things. Oh, and now they want a re-match.

See you on the show floor.

Jim Obermeyer has been in the trade show industry over 20 years, both as a corporate trade show manager and exhibit house executive. He is now a partner in a trade show and event marketing firm: Reveal: Exhibiting a World of Difference. He can be reached at jobermeyer@revealexhibits.com.