

'Make it fun to hire and develop staff'

AS SOME traditional approaches to training achieve poor results and bore staff, it may be time to bring new ideas into the human resources mix so that it can contribute more to business success.

This is the view of Fiona Ross, director of experiential training organisation Learn to Lead.

Ross agrees with author Susan El-Shamy that training should be based on a variety of learning theories and stimulate as many senses as possible – with games being the ideal tools for that.

In El-Shamy's best-seller, *Training Games: Everything You Need to Know About Using Games to Reinforce Learning*, the author says there is more to playing a training game than winning or losing.

"With a well-designed and delivered training game, you can repeat and reinforce key learning concepts. People can safely practise new skills and analyse, interpret, discuss and reflect on new information in a stimulating, challenging and enjoyable context."

Ross says a recent feature in the magazine *Human Capital Management* argued that entertainment and learning need not be mutually exclusive. Delivered in the right format, they could support each other to great effect.

"It is in specific workplace and decision-making skills that gaming and, in particular, simulation is now really coming into its own," the article stated.

The benefits of games are diffi-



cult to achieve through traditional training methods such as presentations and lectures alone, says Ross.

These benefits include getting people to express themselves more freely, revealing hidden issues and talents, and generating an atmosphere of energy and enjoyment.

"It is widely believed that experiential learning is better than 'chalk and talk' lecturing since students remember more when they are involved," she says.

"To quote Lao Tzu, the ancient Chinese sage and author of the *Tao Te Ching*, 'Tell me and I'll know, show me and I'll understand, involve me and I'll never forget.'"

Ross says training games can be similar technically to many of the best-loved games we all know, from puzzle and trivia games to card and board games. The latter, for example, can be designed to integrate learning on almost any topic, from an organisation's safety or customer service policies and processes to its long-term strategy.

"Board games allow for face-to-face interaction in a classroom setting. Direct verbal feedback can be



Fiona Ross believes games reveal interaction and leadership.

given and this carries a high impact," she says. "In addition, learners can observe different leadership styles at play."

A board game developed by Learn to Lead, "Leaders in Action", for example, teaches six core leadership competencies: clear communication; effective management of change; motivating a team; dealing with conflict and difficult issues; effective planning and organising; and delivering through others while getting your own work done.

"What makes the game exciting and involving is that teams have to perform six different tasks, each of which teaches them about a partic-

ular leadership competency.

"The good versus evil theme provides a story context that engages delegates and by successfully completing each task, the team earns points. In the communication task, for example, the teams must try to build a roadblock based on a copy of top secret plans.

"The problem is that only the leader has a copy of the plans. The leader has to elect one person to be his 'ears' and the rest of the team has to decipher the message from the ears in a kind of a 'broken telephone' task, and design the roadblock simply on a verbal briefing."

The task represents the various levels and channels that messages have to get through within an organisation without losing integrity.

"Corporate leaders have to try to communicate clearly to prevent mixed messages at the bottom of their organisation. This task helps them learn how to do so."

In the conflict resolution task, the delegates role-play a conflict of a car breakdown during a wild car chase, while the leader intervenes and tries to resolve it.

"The game allows for immediate peer feedback on a participant's leadership ability, based on a scorecard," Ross says.

"The scorecard describes how the task should have been done, breaking it down into smaller competencies. Leaders earn up to 15 points for their team for each task and there is an overall winner."

An exciting new application is in the assessment of potential new staff. "Traditionally, interviews have been the norm for most firms, but, when it comes to choosing between closely matched individuals, a game is the perfect tool for previewing their real-world performance," she says.

KPMG recently became one of the first firms in South Africa to use games as part of its assessment of graduate recruits, Ross says.

"We used Leaders in Action successfully as an assessment tool for a group of 13 graduates that needed to be reduced to a shortlist of six.

"The group had already been through two panel interviews. Although they were nervous at first, the game actually helped to distract them from the pressure from a panel of interviewers.

Jerome Rieck, people manager, tax, advisory and support at KPMG, says introducing the game component into the recruitment process has helped with hiring the best candidates.

"We found that using games was a great way to look at people in a space where they could just be themselves," Rieck adds.

"We could assess them in key areas such as interpersonal skills (to see) if they are problem-solvers, their ability to motivate others, how they communicate, deal with pressure, and if they have leadership abilities," says Rieck.

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