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Managers (Not Trainers) Must Guarantee Performance

A coordinated training plan helps to ensure employee-employer success

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IN THE FLEET MAINTENANCE and service industry, it seems almost everyone wants more training. The demands of keeping vehicles available for customer use or for customer service are overwhelming, and well-trained, highly skilled technicians are required to keep the fleet ready and able. But there never seem to be enough “highly skilled” technicians, and lack of training is frequently cited as the reason.

As I have mentioned in previous articles, training is not always the solution to job performance problems—and in fact is not even the best solution for most of these problems. Similarly, trainers are not your best source for guaranteeing performance on the job. That distinction belongs to your fleet manager, service manager and/or shop foreman.

According to a well-traveled book by human performance guru Dr. Robert F. Mager, “trainers can guarantee skills, but they cannot guarantee on-the-job performance.” Adding to this thought, “Only managers can be held accountable for on-the-job performance.”¹

The reason, Mager continues, is that there are four elements to human performance, and training can address only two:

1. Skills and knowledge
2. Self-efficacy (the performer’s belief that he can do something, if taught)
3. Opportunity to perform
4. Supportive environment

Training can address number one above, and to some extent number two. Only managers can provide numbers three and four—and these may well be more critical

than what training can provide.

Another analysis of job performance deficiency that first appeared in a 1979 issue of Human Performance Quarterly splits performance problems into two categories: job system problems and performer problems. Among job system problems would be environmental and other workplace factors that prohibit performance regardless of the individual involved.

These are things like (but not limited to): poor facilities, lack of equipment/tools, lack of information, inaccurate information, no

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opportunities to try new tasks, lack of rewards, or “punishment” for performing well.

Performer problems involve the individual. That means everything on the performer problem side can be addressed through training, right? Wrong. Among performer problems, there is a second division into “can’t perform” and “won’t perform.” Reasons an employee won’t perform may be: lack of motivation, lack of self-efficacy, lifestyles/priorities or incompatible attitude. Among this category, training can only have an effect on self-efficacy—and managers have an even bigger influence on that.



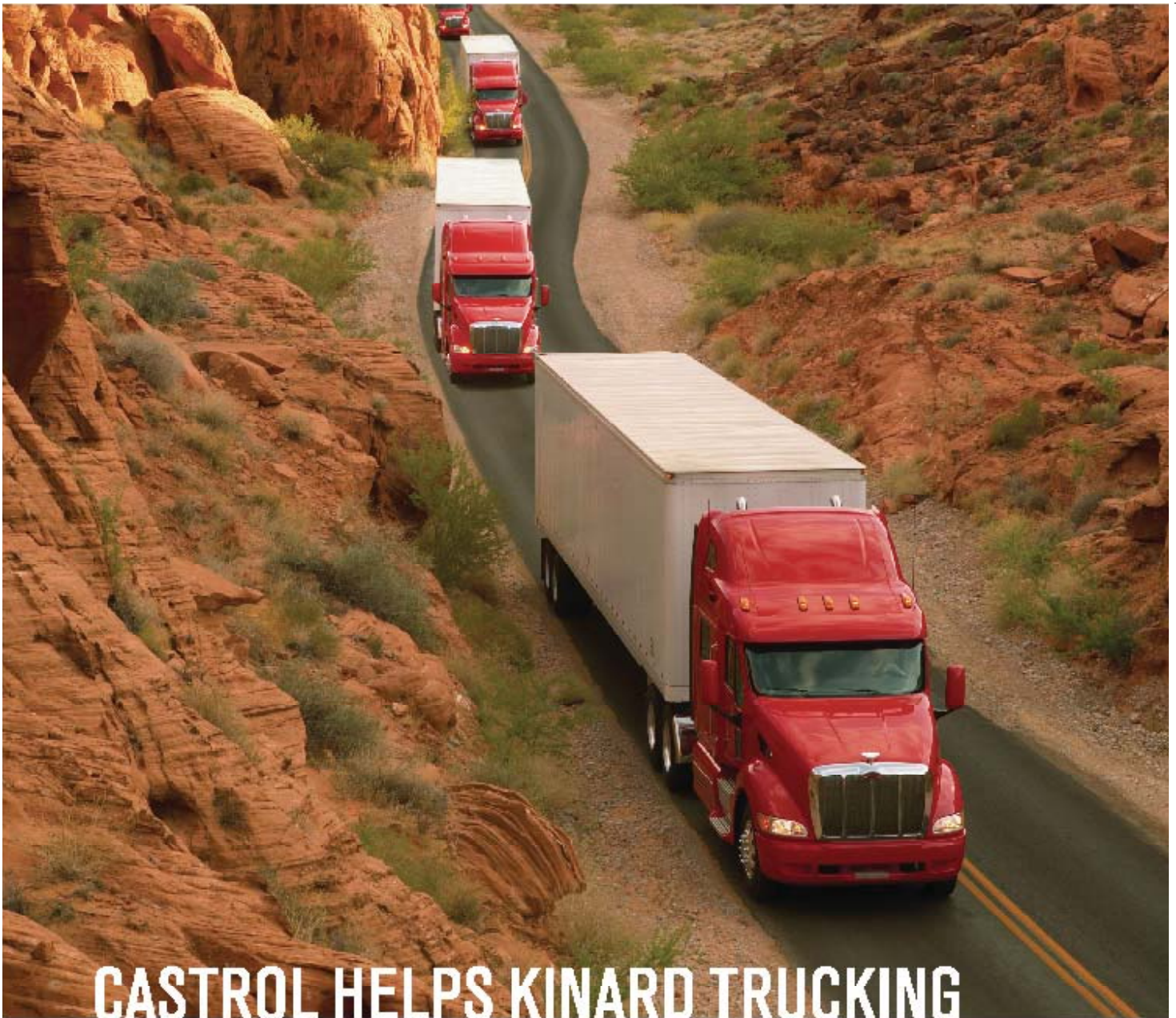
Finally, the reasons an employee can’t perform may be due to skill and knowledge deficiencies, which training is well-equipped to address. In some cases, the reason an employee can’t perform is a job-performer mismatch, which no amount of training can fix. As my father used to say of his own abilities as a trainer, “I can turn lead into gold, but I can’t make something out of nothing.”

Managers must also address situations where an employee can’t perform due to lack of feedback or poor communication of job tasks and expectations.

This doesn’t let trainers off the hook for their portion of the performance deficiency equation. If your employees need to acquire new skills and knowledge or update the same, you have every right to expect a trainer to guarantee performance outcomes in their sessions. This requires strong up-front needs assessments, well-defined objectives, with content and evaluations built around those objectives. It is then up to the manager to ensure the employee gets opportunities to put those newfound skills to use on the job in a timely manner—with frequent feedback on what is done well and what needs improvement. **FMK**

¹ Mager, Robert F., *What Every Manager Should Know About Training, Second Edition*. Copyright 1999, 1992 - The Center for Effective Performance, Inc.

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