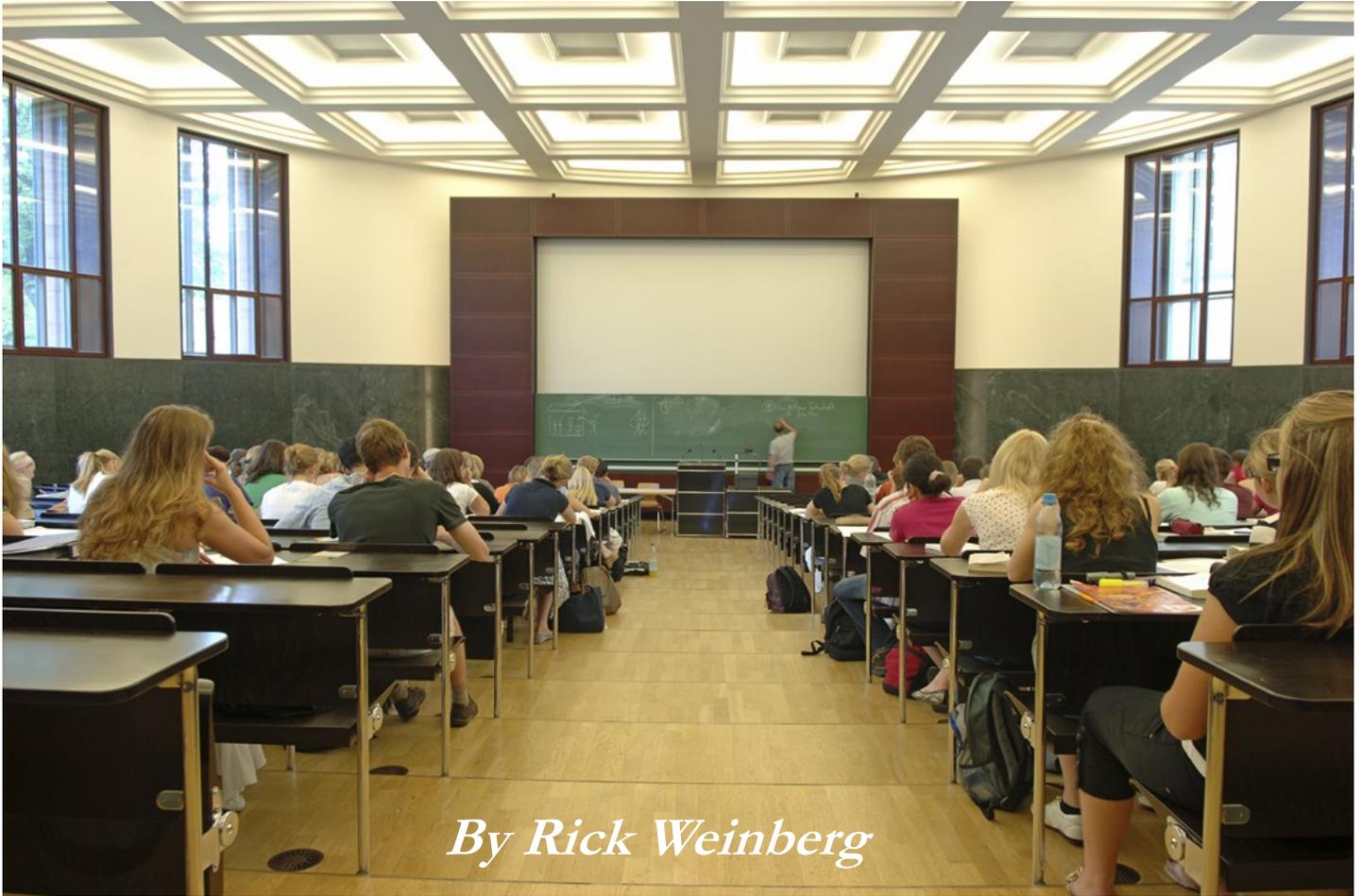


Getting Schooled



By Rick Weinberg

Southern California Community Colleges Offer an Array of Low-Cost Training and Employee Performance Solutions That Enhance the Productivity of Local Businesses.

When Crevier BMW, one of the nation's top automobile dealers, wanted to improve its sales force, it turned to the training solutions group at a California Community College: Santa Ana College.

Surprisingly, not many local

companies in the Southern California are aware of the community colleges' array of performance-based business solution services. However, slowly but surely, word is finally leaking out about how efficient—and cost effective—the colleges' training solutions are for local businesses.

“We have tremendous resources that many people aren't aware of,” says Linda Langgle, who is responsible for business services and training solutions of community colleges in Orange County, Calif. “Our trainers are often times Ph. D. level people who are true experts in their fields,

Southern California's community colleges are beginning to take training solutions to the local communities to a whole new plateau. The colleges offer a range of services and programs to local companies that enhance the business as well as their employees' performance. Using innovative techniques of performance-focused data, the colleges help identify solutions on site for improving employee and company productivity to attain maximum performance.

"We have a tremendous training solutions program that is probably the best-kept secret in Southern California," says Oscar Machado, Jr., the director of the Training and Development Institute of North Orange County Community College District's School of Continuing Education. "Our programs are an amazing value to the community, but a lot of companies aren't taking advantage of it because they don't know about it."

Crevier BMW did—and when a company as well-known as that utilizes the services of the community college system and flourishes in a specific area because of it, well, other companies tend to take notice.

The community colleges' training solutions range from customer service and teambuilding workshops to business writing and vocational skills courses delivered on site at a company's location. The training solutions group not only features top training experts, but also a high level of integrity, morals and values.



Some of Southern California Community College trainers are Ph. D. level and true experts in their fields, according to Linda Langgle, manager of business services and training solutions of community colleges in Orange County, Calif. Langgle says other training providers might not even have a teaching credential, let alone any depth of expertise on the subject matter.

How good are the training solutions from Southern California Community Colleges? Well, when Crevier BMW, one of the nation's top automobile dealers, wanted to improve its sales force, it turned to a California Community College: Santa Ana College.

When Crevier BMW, for instance, came to Santa Ana College seeking to improve its sales team's performance, the college's training staff researched the problem and discovered that the actual source of the quandary didn't lie in the sales division but in the company's hiring process of the sales unit.

According to Crevier BMW owner Don Crevier, most companies would not have done the analysis that Santa Ana College did. Other companies might have walked in and gave some kind of spiel to the sales team on what they can do to improve sales.

But the college's performance improvement experts

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But the college’s performance improvement experts uncovered the actual problem area and focused on strengthening that, clearly illustrating the conscientiousness and character of the program and its staff.

“These services,” Crevier says, “would benefit any business.”

The college’s training service was “the perfect solution for me,” says Bob Keith of Gold Coast Baking Co., whose staff received performance development plans and job aids for on-the-job learning.

The colleges view themselves as having more than the ability to simply train employees.

“We make sure that what our clients expect to get out of training, which is improving the performance of employees, is what they actually get,” Langgle says.

Often times, the return on investment in training is not realized because, as Langgle points out, the root of a company’s problem is not necessarily its employees’ lack of knowledge. There are three

basic factors that affect an employee’s performance, according to Langgle: “They have to have knowledge, they have to have the right tools and they have to have the proper environment to succeed,” she says.

So, in the case of Crevier, Langgle’s training staff found that there was not a “formalized performance-based hiring system” in place.

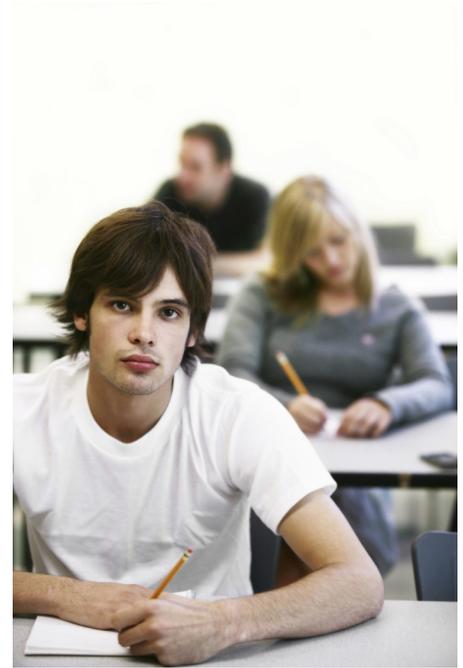
“What Crevier BMW asked for was sales training, but what they actually wanted was people with integrity, people who knew how to relate very professionally with the high-end customer,” Langgle says.

“They wanted people who know how to be a people’s person. These are qualities that are more intrinsic to a person’s character and personality—not something you can teach in training.”

So Langgle and her training team created a workshop for the hiring managers to orient the auto dealer’s hiring system toward being more “performance-based.”

“Had Crevier BMW received just sales training, it might have had some benefits for them,” she says. “But it wouldn’t have affected the behaviors that they described they were hoping to develop in their employees. Sales training would not have helped develop those particular behaviors, and it wouldn’t have affected the things they wanted to affect in their business.”

Many of Southern California’s community colleges can do for local business what Santa Ana



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College did for Crevier BMW. Whether it’s Irvine Valley College, West L.A. City College or Mt. San Antonio College in Walnut, the colleges are more than capable and well quipped to handle any problem of a local business—and they provide the service at a reasonable cost.

“We don’t just provide training; we provide solutions to problems and issues that businesses have,” says Gary Kay, director of training at Mt. San Antonio College.

“Training for the sake of training is a waste of money. So before we offer training solutions, I don’t ask a company what training needs it requires. I say, ‘Why do you think training will solve the problem you have?’ Or I ask them to tell me about the issues going on in their organization.”



When Crevier BMW came to Santa Ana College seeking to improve its sales team's performance, the college's training staff researched the problem and discovered that the actual source of the quandary didn't lie in the sales division but in the company's hiring process of the sales unit. According to Crevier BMW owner Don Crevier (pictured left), most companies would not have done the analysis that Santa Ana College did. Other companies might have walked in and gave some kind of spiel to the sales team on what they can do to improve sales.

All community colleges are government entities designed to help the people and businesses of a community. The value proposition is excellent, according to industry experts, because the colleges have cutting-edge teaching methodology, expert faculty and staff members, and the fees the colleges charge are cost recovery.

One of most popular services the community colleges feature is comprehensive Vocational English training for employees and managers. These workshops are unique in that the colleges' staff focuses the language training within the framework of the client's industry. This is a valuable program, according to several local business owners, because many Southland companies have employees whose first language is not English.

"We have quite a few clients throughout Southern California who have employees who have all of the technical competencies but whose language skills create a communi-

cation gap, and that causes performance challenges for companies and employees," Machado says.

So, what the community colleges do is create instruction based on the scope of the client's working environment. The English taught in these types of classes is customized; it's specifically related to the client's industry and working environment.

"A lot of frontline managers supervise non-native English speaking employees, but they need to be able to convey concepts that are important in their work culture," Langgle says. "It's difficult to manage performance if you cannot communicate with employees and get your point across. The ramifications of a lack of skills in this area are tremendous."

The state of California wants local businesses to take full advantage of the community college training network, yet many businesses do not realize they even need training until a crisis strikes, Kay says.

"When do people check for a heart attack? When they have

a heart attack of course," he says.

"Some business owners buy new equipment for a million dollars yet they don't put any money into their biggest resource: their employees."

As local business owner Lee Prather of A Laser Printer Service in Laguna Hills points out, "Any business that doesn't take advantage of [the colleges'] services is crazy."

— *By Rick Weinberg, Editor, California Business Journal*

For more information on California Community College's training services and solutions, contact Linda Langgle at Rancho Santiago Community College at 714-480-7300 www.rsccd.edu