

The Big B

by Aw Choon Hui, Deputy Chief Executive Officer



This article was featured in the Mar 2008 issue of Wealth Magazine. Below is the original article by Aw Choon Hui, for your reading pleasure.

Corporations are demanding returns from investment into executive training. All eyes on the big B – the bottomline.

Wait not, want not

Sending executives for regular training may be merely lip service for some companies. Speaking from his experience working in large corporations, Aw Choon Hui points out that sometimes, clocking training hours is seen more as a key performance indicator to be fulfilled as opposed to being an integral part of the employee's career plan.

"A typical curriculum of an executive's yearly diet of training hours would consist of short workshop stints, lasting two to three days at most. Held in hotel venues, it is more of a respite from work or networking event rather than something taken seriously as an important event to learn new skills or increase one's technical knowledge," says Aw, who is currently Deputy CEO at GYC Financial Advisory, a financial services consultancy in Singapore.

As a result, he believes people should take control of their own education. "You need to

take charge of your own 'executive training' programme rather than wait for your boss or HR department to initiate one (which may never come!). This is especially so now with changing job trends, where contract work and outsourcing is slowly replacing traditional permanently staffed bastions," he reflects.

Aw speaks from personal experience. In the late 1990s, he was working at a major corporation and felt he had reached a ceiling in terms of his technical competence and training. "Trained as an engineer, I felt the need to understand and learn more about general management and marketing," he explains.

However, his former company's executive education programmes did not satisfy him because he felt they were not serious or rigorous enough. "I realised that I had to take charge of my training or stagnate in my career. I chose the former and subjected myself to a gruelling programme of rushing for classes after an exhausting day at work as I gunned for a post-graduate business course at our local university.

"To cut a long story short, I found several subjects intriguing and fascinating, like law and marketing strategy, that I was able to relate to my work sphere, and suddenly, my horizons began to broaden."

However, even after completing his course, he found that the company did not attempt to employ his new-found knowledge. "It was, 'thank you, well done, but get back to work!'" he recalls.

But he believes that the landscape is changing and that organisations' attitudes are improving. Now as the deputy CEO of GYC, a smaller firm, Aw sees a different aspect to the question of training. Small and medium-sized enterprises do not always have the means to send executives for training. In addition, human resources are spread more thinly in SMEs. There is also the fear that the executive will leave for another job after being trained. "But if SMEs don't spend on executive training, it could become the very reason for the staff to leave for larger corporations," he notes.

One possible solution is for the executive and the company to share the cost of a suitable programme such as an executive MBA, he says. The company gradually pays back the executive's portion over the agreed number of years that he continues to work in the company following the completion of the programme. "There can be several permutations to this 'contract', but the concept remains the same. This can be a win-win solution for both parties," he suggests.



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