Private-Sector Continuing Education and Training Initiatives: The Sea-Land Experience

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I will offer you a private-sector snapshot of some of the pressures and factors affecting education and training as they relate to intermodalism and transportation within Sea-Land and, to some extent, CSX Corporation.

It is important to note the evolution of intermodalism when one looks at private-sector education and training issues. Perhaps the most appropriate descriptor for this evolution would be "rapid change." Within Sea-Land, intermodalism evolves on almost a weekly basis as new kinds of services are offered in different markets, as new trucking firms become intermodal partners, as new types of warehousing opportunities emerge—our organization is undergoing continual and rapid change.

Another issue to be dealt with is what I will term the "tough love" environment in which we operate. At the present time, ocean container shipping is under a lot of stress, with considerable international competition and some overall tough times. What does that mean for training and education? Simply put, there is less money to develop it and there is less time to devote to it. In other words, we operate as a very lean, aggressive training and education group facing a lot of challenges in a very fast-paced environment.

All of us are affected by the new information world. There are a number of recent books that address this issue. One, entitled *The Digital Economy*, points out that changes in information have changed the way business is done worldwide. This role of information poses an enormous challenge to educators and their ability to stay current and to offer the kind of learning necessary for people to adapt to continual change.

Why is intermodalism important to CSX? First, CSX is truly a multimodal organization. If there is any organization that should have its arms around training and education in the intermodal world, it should be CSX. We should be doing this the best, setting the industry standard. We continually learn and try to get better at it because we are a global intermodal organization—we have barge operations, ocean container shipping, rail, air freight, and a vast amount of logistics services. As whole, the company is right in the middle of this whole topic.

What is CSX/Sea-Land doing? I will start at the executive level and look at a top-down approach to how we are handling intermodal training and education. University partnerships with a number of schools have worked quite well for us. We have worked with the University of Tennessee, including sending people to their executive M.B.A program, in which a fair amount of transportation-related issues are embedded. We also work with them in a research format. For example, as a vendor they have built multimedia modules for us and as a partner have created educational materials for us to use in our railroad operations.

CSX also recently participated in a special kind of partnership with the Darden School at the University of Virginia, which involved representatives from a consortium of companies that were brought together for an executive program focused on intermodal issues. The program included an on-site 2-week curriculum component and an off-site project-based component, for which CSX developed a supply chain project. The final phase of the program again brought the participants together to work through their projects as a group.

At present, CSX/Sea-Land is setting up a local relationship with the McCall School of Business at Queens College in Charlotte, North Carolina, for a unique executive education program that will be offered only to top-tier individuals within the Sea-Land organization. The program will be tailored to a weekend format (Friday and Saturday), and the cases and methodologies for learning will focus specifically on Sea-Land operations. The approach is to reduce the theoretical approach and increase the focus on real-world case studies of intermodal and transportation issues that people face in their work environment. The Queens College program offers a convenient time and a convenient location that works logistically for the leadership of our organization. The curriculum is tailored toward Sea-Land. We work with faculty to develop the case studies used in the program. It is also establishing a partnership between academia and the private sector within the local Charlotte community, affording other opportunities for learning.

We also encourage executives to participate in university-sponsored short courses offered through organizations such as Northwestern University in specific areas relating to intermodalism. We are working very closely with the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy (USMMA) at Kings Point, encouraging internship programs and actively participating in the development of the USMMA intermodal and logistics program. Sea-Land Senior Vice President Charles Raymond, who earlier presented an intermodal case study, serves on the Vision 2000 Committee, which is helping the USMMA work through the future of its programs and offerings to ensure that private-sector issues and concerns are blended into the curriculum. Sea-Land personnel also get involved by coming back and helping the USMMA cadets face future challenges, including participation in an interviewing skills course. Currently, I am working with USMMA faculty to develop case studies based on actual Sea-Land activities, which can be used in the curriculum to help shape the learning experience of the cadets as they go through the program.

We are working on a management trainee program in which bright young university students are invited to come into the Sea-Land organization. We then rotate them quickly through various departments so that they can learn the business and identify potential key positions in the organization.

Another challenge we face is normal recruiting with the universities. However, the preponderance of our efforts focuses on developing the current workforce; in other words, we are not doing a lot of hiring. In fact, we are contracting in size and learning how to operate as a leaner organization. Therefore, the majority of my time is spent developing programs for those already in the workforce.

I believe that it is important to focus on nontraditional ways of teaching and training—to touch people and help them learn about intermodal and transportation issues. For example, there is a whole host of Internet-based learning that can be accessed in a self-directed style. Individuals can go to the World Wide Web to get information, search topics, find contacts, and form networks to learn from others. Use of the Web is proliferating in many aspects of our lives, through business and at home, and this source will become one of the primary drivers of development for people in terms of gaining more information about intermodalism and the business surrounding it.

From an intranet perspective, Sea-Land has on its internal system various learning tools for those front-line service providers. A vast number of people in different geographic areas need to have exposure to training, education, and knowledge; I have to touch people in 110 countries. The challenge is really the delivery system. How do you get the information and the tools to them? The intranet strategy is becoming one of our primary strategic delivery platforms for trying to proliferate information to front-line service providers throughout the Sea-Land network.

One example of the partnerships we are entering into on the intranet includes the Harvard Business School, which has an intranet-based management coaching tool that we are piloting for them on our intranet. We also have a number of Gartner Group courses on basic applications training, computer literacy issues, and so forth that can be taken through our intranet. We have also developed chat centers and threaded newsgroups where people can get online and talk about issues; for example, those in Hong Kong can network with those in Long Beach on issues in the business. This is where the power of technology helps people grow and develop and learn.

What will be needed in the future? Three or four things are needed to proliferate intermodal education throughout my world in the private sector. The first is to craft and integrate career paths and developmental plans that provide intermodal learning opportunities. As I think about development in my world, I need to make sure that there are points in the development cycle that are going to address the intermodal issues that we face. I also need to proliferate the Web-based learning. This will become one of my major strategies in terms of increasing awareness of intermodal issues within the workforce in general. We also need to push our partnerships with academia, from the standpoint both of getting better at them and doing more with them, and of pushing our people out into academia to participate and become part of the content that experts are talking about at institutions throughout the country.

Finally, one of the greatest paybacks for an organization is the development of skills in critical thinking and collaboration, both of which are essential to general manage-

ment. Organizations need people with the skills and ability to think well together, to solve problems more effectively. These types of skills and the ability to integrate these skills into private- or public-sector organizations will be fundamental to enabling those groups to move forward.

SUMMARY OF DIALOGUE WITH AUDIENCE

Question

How do you determine an appropriate subject to be taught in distance learning, and what is the reaction from the student population as to their capability to absorb the material and be able to use it materially in the workplace?

Response

Most of it is driven by the business; for example, Sea-Land is currently integrating a new supply chain management software tool called Sea Blocks that tracks cargo from origin to destination through the entire supply chain. One of the challenges we face is how to make people aware of the new software, of how it will be used in the organization, and of how it will affect their particular job. Sea-Land is not trying to teach intermodalism, but rather introducing intermodal issues that relate to the specific job that Sea-Land does.

Question

At some point, doesn't someone have to figure out what an appropriate topic is to be taught by other media, determine the ability of students to absorb the material, and measure how effective that training environment is in lieu of other options? If one is trying to influence performance and behavior with relation to how people do their job, one needs to be careful with respect to the media used to convey that message, as well as the content of the message being sent. Individuals learn in different ways and different styles, and one cannot bank everything on distance learning.

Response

What I have presented is just one platform or delivery alternative that is fundamental to a global company that has to touch people in a number of locations on a tight budget. I am not suggesting that it is the answer to all educational issues, but rather that it is one of the approaches to providing awareness and knowledge that we can use to get something in front of our workforce to help them learn and understand their environment.

Question

In looking at your workforce issues, have you identified what you think are some of the critical shortages or critical areas for retraining within your own internal training program?

Response

I have previously mentioned one of the most important—critical thinking and collaboration skills at all levels of the organization. The number one challenge from a learning perspective, however, is computer literacy and the use of technology in the business. This is critical at every level, from the CEO down to the administrative staff who work in all the offices.

Question

If you have your training in 110 countries, how do you address the cultural and language issues?

Response

That is a complex and intriguing issue. Because all of our business associates speak English, we do not have to deal with language differences. However, there remains the issue of how people of different cultures respond to the way information is presented. Message design is critical.