

Tips for Productive Spanish Training

Should you opt for Spanish Training?

Despite the need, most organizations have limited time and budget for Spanish training. Some ignore the need hoping that language barrier problems will be occasional and relatively mild in scope. Others opt for training but don't think through what they really need to accomplish. However, an organization needs to assess the potential cost and gain from a language barrier considering these among other factors:

- What is the financial cost of an accident, quality mistake, inappropriate treatment, etc.?
- What is the cost in terms of lost productivity, poor morale, bad publicity, etc.?
- What would you gain by improving communication with your Spanish-speaking target?
- Assessing the above, what approach offers the most benefit to your organization?

Key factors in achieving productive Spanish training – your must define:

- **Who needs to communicate with whom?** -- while this may seem apparent, it is important to analyze and define your needs. Too often, organizations react to an “event” and rush to do “some Spanish training”. Defining who must communicate is the first step toward successful training.
- **How extensively must they be able to communicate?** -- for example, if you need to conduct a benefits meeting or explain complex manufacturing processes, you'll need an interpreter or fluently bilingual associate to conduct this communication. Complex tasks require a high level of proficiency.

On the other hand, if the communication is tightly focused and relatively uncomplicated, then targeted Spanish training can readily handle these needs. Examples are bank deposits, greeting customers, showing someone what to do, getting application information, or asking basic medical questions.

- **What do the people being trained need to learn?** – Answering this question narrows the universe of Spanish to be learned. It focuses the training on your specific problems and expected results. This is VERY important since time wasted in learning non-germane terminology, grammar, rules, etc. not only takes away from time that could be spent on relevant material, it often confuses the “trainee” and leads to a loss of confidence as they mull over nuances that are only important to fluent learners.

After training more than 3,000 people and getting comments from many others who have used our learning materials, there are two key factors in determining success and productivity:

- Relevance to their job and daily interface with Spanish-speakers
- Confidence in their ability to say something in Spanish without embarrassing themselves

Confidence and relevance come from learning and practicing what is important rather than from a superficial exposure to “lots of Spanish.” Identifying and prioritizing what is to be learned is the most important that can be taken both for class training and for self-study.

- **How much time and money must be devoted to Spanish training?** -- Questions 4 and 6 on the questionnaire pinpoint problems to address and results that are expected. However, we have frequently found that expectations for 12 or 16 hours of classes are much too high.

Think back to your high school or college language classes —most people spent hours and hours learning grammar, verb conjugations, etc. After all that class time and study (between 105 and 150 hours of class time per school year), what did you learn that was important or meaningful?

The point for those overseeing the training is to manage expectations. It takes time and practice to become comfortable and confident with any language. Less is more. The more relevant the material, the more likely the “student” will actively participate and enjoy learning it. Save the grammar and rules for those associates who want to move on to higher levels of proficiency later.

Budgets will run anywhere from \$50 to \$200 per hour depending on the type of instructor, the number of students in the class, and the number of hours of training. Instructors run the gamut from individuals who speak Spanish (but are not trainers) to colleges. We suggest talking to the contract training or adult education department at your local college, community college, language school or high school.

Make sure you segment class attendees into groups with similar learning needs – otherwise you will have bored people and waste money. Example: our Firefighters & EMS materials contain terminology for both firefighters/paramedics and Dispatchers. While both groups could be together for learning pronunciation and basic expressions, the EMS folks could care less about the dispatchers material and vice versa. Segmenting the class into two groups may cost more money but it will pay dividends in terms of learning and communication.

What type of instructor will conduct the training?

This is a critical decision. Unlike traditional academic learning, teaching Spanish for use in the workplace requires an instructor who can relate to the needs of the group being taught. This is “bottom up training” as opposed to top down academic learning. It is absolutely critical that the instructor understands your problems and objectives and focuses the learning around these elements.

Our materials, along with those of other companies, contain “tons of material” – but all that material is not of equal importance. And some of it may not be relevant to your needs. Your instructor must keep the class on a focused path, rather than getting caught up in questions and explanations about grammatical issues, how to say something else, etc.

It is most productive to have an instructor who has industry experience, either from working in the industry or teaching classes to other organizations with similar needs. Your instructor should be energetic, flexible and totally focused on your needs rather than what she or he wants to teach.

Keep it going when classes are finished

Most assuredly with language learning – if you don’t use it, you lose it. So do a few things that encourage people to showcase their newly found Spanish abilities. This need not be expensive or elaborate – try simple things like their boss asking about the training, or having Spanish-speaking employees encourage them to practice and learn more.

Like any training, Spanish must be practiced and used. Make it easy for that to happen.

Spanish Training Questionnaire

This questionnaire will help determine your key objective(s) for Spanish training, who the participants should be, and what results you want to accomplish:

1. What type of organization are you? (company, government, etc.) _____

2. Who are the Spanish speakers you must communicate with? (check all that apply)

Employees Work Crews Contractors Job Applicants Other _____

Supervisors Customers Patients Citizens Emergency Victims

3. Who are the English speakers to be trained? (e.g., supervisors, police officers, salespeople, medical staff)

4. What are the 2 or 3 most important problems you want to solve? (be specific)

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

5. How proficient must your associates become?

learn a few basics speak brief, relevant phrases have extensive discussion

6. When training is completed, what result(s) do you expect to achieve?

7. What materials will your associates need during and after training?

8. How much time can be devoted to Spanish training? _____

9. What is the available budget for Spanish training? _____

10. Do you have the “right” instructor? _____