

Power Lunch: Teaming to Train

Prepared for the U.S. Department of Energy
Office of Environmental Restoration and
Waste Management



Westinghouse
Hanford Company Richland, Washington

Hanford Operations and Engineering Contractor for the
U.S. Department of Energy under Contract DE-AC06-87RL10930

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POWER LUNCH: TEAMING TO TRAIN

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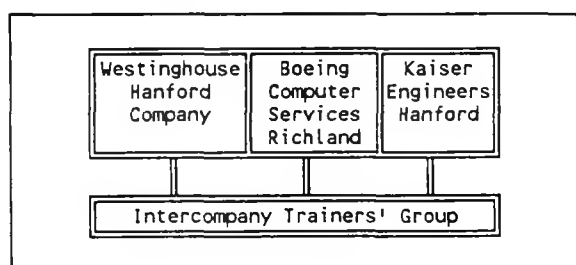
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In 1990, the Hanford Site, a U.S. Department of Energy project, changed missions from defense production to environmental restoration. An engineering group at Westinghouse Hanford Company, prime contractor at the Hanford Site, hired a trainer to help publish documents and develop group-specific courses. Boeing Computer Services Richland, subcontractor providing publications services, hired editor trainers. Kaiser Engineers Hanford, another subcontractor, provides site-wide Quality training. Four trainers, friends, met weekly for lunch: These meetings evolved into training exchanges. This presentation illustrates ways that inter- or intra-company teaming can work to improve technical communication.

POWER LUNCH: TEAMING TO TRAIN

Power Lunch: The History

Trainers from three companies are involved in this team: Westinghouse Hanford Company (Westinghouse Hanford), Boeing Computer Services (Boeing Richland), and Kaiser Engineers Hanford (Kaiser).



Richland (Boeing Richland), and Kaiser Engineers Hanford (Kaiser). All three provide services at the Hanford Site, a nuclear reservation in central eastern Washington. The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has contracted with Westinghouse Hanford to manage the Site. Boeing Richland is a subcontractor to Westinghouse Hanford, providing, among other services, publications support. Kaiser manages the Quality Training Resource Center, a DOE training function providing technical training to all contractors and subcontractors at the Hanford Site.

Several years ago, when Westinghouse Hanford took over the contract to run the Hanford Site, there was a dramatic personnel reduction in the publications department, followed this past year by an equally dramatic expansion to an even larger department. This expansion

resulted in the hiring of a large number of relatively inexperienced editors who needed training in site-specific publishing and editing practices, usage and format standards, and publication procedures.

In 1990, the Hanford Site mission changed from defense production (with documentation that was mostly classified and so not publicly available) to environmental restoration and waste management (meaning a greater degree of public access and more documents published to external publication standards). Despite the disparate numbers of engineers (very many) compared to numbers of writers and editors (very few), the truth is that paper (i.e., documentation) is our most important product.

The newly expanded publications department and the increased emphasis on external-quality documents created two problems: (1) a need for immediate, on-the-job training of editors to meet the demand for quality and the growing customer base; and (2) editor frustration at spending time "cleaning up" documents instead of editing to improve document organization, sentence structure, and word choice. The department was spending so much time on housekeeping tasks such as acronym use, abbreviations, and units of measure that they could hardly spare the time to train new editors, much less try to educate authors.

Appetizers: Forming the Team

The Intercompany Trainers' Group, now a recognized resource in our departments, began with four technical communicators from three companies who met weekly for lunch. Complaining about work at lunch eventually turned into problem-solving



sessions: we laughingly called ourselves the "Intercompany Trainers' Group" and told our managers our weekly lunch meeting was to work on cooperative training programs. Little did we realize at the time that what was intended as an excuse would turn into serious business with significant cost and time savings to all three companies.

The Diners: Who We Are

Elenor was the first. A contract editor on loan to Boeing Richland, she shared an office with Brenda, a Boeing Richland editor. The Kaiser connection, Dorothy, was a customer of Elenor's and got to know Brenda through Elenor.

Shortly after Elenor was hired by Boeing Richland as an editor, Brenda moved to Westinghouse Hanford to set up a training program on document production and writing for an engineering group. Dorothy, at Kaiser, became the

head of training documentation for the Quality Training Resource Center.

A little later, Boeing Richland's Publications Services, attending to a long-standing need, created two trainer positions to provide ongoing training for editors, to orient new staff, and to standardize the varying practices that were hindering cost-effective production. Elenor was one of two editors selected for the positions. The other one, who became our fourth Intercompany Trainers' Group member, was Judith. She now joined the lunch meetings.

The Menu: Skills Mix

Continuing the long-standing pattern, Brenda, Dorothy, Elenor, and Judith lunched weekly to discuss what each was doing and to look for solutions to problems each was facing.

We discovered that each has



expertise in different but complementary areas: Elenor is a computer power user who enjoys

nothing more than figuring out how to maximize computer performance. Brenda is a grammar guru whose



belief that engineers *can* learn to write precise and graceful prose borders on the evangelical;

Dorothy cuts to the heart of any problem

and finds a solution; and Judith is a whiz at finding ways to organize and streamline procedures and provide needed training as only an ex-high school teacher can.



Our timing in formalizing the group was fortuitous. The trainers' group was coming together while the DOE was calling on its contractors to pool their expertise to solve the environmental problems caused by a half-century of nuclear materials production at the Hanford Site. We encountered surprisingly little skepticism about our Intercompany Trainers' Group meetings. What skepticism we did encounter has disappeared as our various managers experience some of the benefits for them and their employees. What we have done is take advantage of each other's skills by arranging training exchanges.

The Main Course: Training Exchanges

Each member of the Intercompany Trainers' Group has been designing and creating training material geared toward her own target population. However, lessons prepared for one group are easily modified for use in the other groups, and by coordinating our efforts, we don't have two members designing the same lesson: we pool our lesson-design resources.

Brenda has taught portions of her grammar courses to Judith and Elenor's group. Judith and Brenda are working to standardize the use and format of references in documents. Elenor has taught the lesson designed for her editors on equation editing and formatting to both Brenda's engineers and Dorothy's word processors, and she has provided computer-use tip sheets to both groups.

Judith, as part of Brenda's classes on preparing and giving oral presentations, gave instructional sessions for Brenda's engineers on choosing materials for translation into visual aids and on designing visuals. These sessions were especially appreciated by those engineers who regularly give presentations to customers and management and who present papers at conferences.

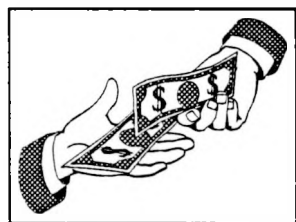
Through Dorothy, Kaiser has asked Brenda to modify her course modules into a 1-1/2 day class to be offered site wide, and they've asked Judith to create a half-day course on livening up boring technical presentations. As part of their training program, Elenor and Judith will require all of their editors to attend Brenda's 1-1/2 day class. In her guise as the Grammar Guru, Brenda visits some staff training sessions for Elenor and Judith and has customized a lesson on revising poorly constructed sentences for Publications Services.

Brenda's presentation on punctuation is now a regular part of the quarterly orientation for new secretarial

and support staff at the Hanford Site. Other engineering groups have begun to write work orders to have her present classes for them. Elenor's equation editing and formatting presentation and Judith's presentation on visuals are also in demand by other groups, such as the administrative and secretarial professional organization and the graphics department. Encouraged by our initial success, we plan to develop other classes in our individual areas of expertise for future exchanges.

We've benefitted in a number of ways: from greater knowledge and expertise in a wider variety of areas; the broader area of resources now available to our respective groups on a no-cost basis; and a lighter training development load from sharing the work. We've discovered improved quality of documents, more pleasant working conditions, good public relations for ourselves as individuals and for the groups for whom we work, and management support if our weekly lunches run longer than the allotted lunch break.

The Tab: What it Costs



When we set up these training exchanges among our own groups, there are no charge-out costs. One individual's time is "paid for" by another individual's time: no paperwork is involved and no overhead charges accrue. The long-term

benefits include savings in time for editors, who, because documents arrive on their desks more closely adhering to site standards, are faced with less "scut" work and the more rewarding job of improving the quality of the language in these documents. The training also allows them to hone their own writing skills and to learn new techniques for solving writing problems.

To other groups willing to contract on an hourly basis, these kinds of training offer convenience, low cost, and an array of communication-skills sharpening not otherwise available. The usual courses offered by other training departments require the trainee's absence from the office, often for two or three days or longer, as well as a hefty fee that must be absorbed by the department. Our training sessions run for an hour or so and focus on a particular skill or technique. If a topic cannot be managed adequately in an hour's time, we offer a series of three or four one-hour sessions given over several weeks.

Materials are tailored to the audience's needs and areas of expertise. Regardless of what grammar mavens may advocate, our writing lessons reflect company usage standards. For authors, this means that writing becomes less onerous as they learn how to apply their computer tools and improved communications skills to document production. For both authors and editors, it means greater job satisfaction. And for the Hanford Site, it means improved product quality and greater customer satisfaction.

If your training department presents many classes to provide training required by national codes or to teach job-specific technical knowledge, our approach may not be as easily applied. However, for those skills that improve product quality, no matter the nature of the product or the technical knowledge required to produce it, our sessions are not only more time and cost efficient—they are also more likely to be well received by the participants.

Attendance is seldom mandatory, and course completion is not required. Those who attend do so because they want to be there—to learn some things that will make their work easier and help them to do it better. Despite their unwillingness to admit it, people who don't write well generally know they don't. Many of them, no matter how they rate their own abilities, realize that writing skills are important to career advancement.

Dessert: Can you do lunch?

You, too, can power lunch. Join with colleagues who share your interests and problems. Pull together a small team

from the people in your company who are interested in quality improvement, training, writing, and editing. Your company may already have training for newly-hired writers or editors to familiarize them with the company style and publications process. This training contains materials that would be useful to the technical people who produce documents—whether those documents are conference presentations, papers, journal publications, computer documentation, manuals, or memos and letters. Everyone can use improvement in written and oral communications skills, and if you can work on those skills within the requirements of company standards, you save money and time, as well as increase training and skills levels in your company.

If you are part of a large organization, teaming to train is a refreshing concept. Making training available to all levels of employees can gain good publicity and increased credibility for your department, improve the quality of the documents you publish, improve productivity, and increase customer satisfaction; to say nothing of livening up your lunch hour!