



## managing a work force

**Skills Training**

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### **Providing English Language Instruction More Important Than Ever**

**By Paula Santonocito**

*Today, more companies are considering relocating or reallocating parts of their operations to countries with more affordable workforces in order to deal with the global recession.*

As companies go global, employing international workers who speak English is critical.

#### **Meeting communication challenges**

One of the challenges of globalization is the ability for teams to work with each other across borders, says Deepak Desai, president and chief executive officer of GlobalEnglish, a company that teaches business English.

For many companies, the language that facilitates communication is English.

Companies use English to conduct business around the world because in so many countries English is now a second language, Desai tells *HRWire*. He gives the example of how people in Argentina can work with people in China using English.

Nevertheless, companies face challenges. Although an employee may possess basic English language skills, he or she may not be proficient in English, especially business English.

Granted, this is the situation in good times and bad. However, now, as companies attempt to do more with less, while also expanding their operations on an international basis, English language skills, or lack of, take on more importance.

“Industries facing tough times look for ways to increase productivity, to work more effectively,” Desai says.

#### **Technology a factor**

The interest in innovative solutions that drive productivity has more companies taking a look at online English language training solutions, like those offered by GlobalEnglish.

But productivity isn't the only motivation. Desai says technology itself is a driver. In the current economy especially, organizations are moving away from tradition classroom training to more cost-effective, scalable, and measurable solutions.

And English language training is no exception.

GlobalEnglish finds the anytime/anywhere aspect of online training offers several advantages over traditional learning methods. "We believe the PC is a perfect solution for learning," says Desai.

He tells *HRWire* that for English language training it's particularly effective.

"Learning a language is very difficult," Desai explains, indicating that it is also very personal.

Take the aspect of word sounds, for example. In some cultures, people would feel embarrassed if they mispronounced words because they would lose face, Desai says.

Using today's computer-based technology, learners have the opportunity to practice in private, while receiving feedback.

### **Options abound**

But individual feedback is only one aspect of personalization. English language training offered by GlobalEnglish includes many options.

The website is available in 14 different languages. For example, a person can read instructions in Portuguese or Chinese. A learner can also choose to read subtitles in a native language.

And these are only a few of the basic features. Because each learner is different, the experience is highly customizable. A learner can choose to talk with a live teacher, for example.

What's more, he or she no longer has to be in front of a computer. In March, to take advantage of changing technology and accommodate changing learner preferences, GlobalEnglish launched the MP3-compatible Mobile Learning Network. "Our users are on the go; they are mobile. They have pockets of time they can use," Desai says.

This summer, the company will launch another feature, a virtual BusinessLounge, an online "place" where users can interact with one another in order to practice their English language skills.

"We want to be on the cutting edge of providing innovative solutions for our users," says Desai.

Why offer so many options?

Part of it has to do with accommodating those who require training.

The need for English language training used to be geared for the executive level, Desai tells *HRWire*. But today virtual teams are being formed by all levels of employees. Even lower-level employees find themselves working in virtual teams, where they require English language skills.

For these workers, and their employers, the old solution of using classroom training simply isn't a viable solution from the standpoint of expense or logistics.

Meanwhile, traditional classroom training brings a structure that may not be conducive to today's global workers.

Although workers have a common goal in learning English, to improve their work performance, people have different learning styles and learn at different paces. There are also culture considerations.

Finally, workers have different requirements based on the industries and operating areas in which they work, as well as their geographic locations.

Enter technology, which allows for greater customization and accommodation, and therefore the potential for increased training success.

### **Understanding the shift**

Although computer-based English language instruction is a way to enhance learning, the economic advantages of online training shouldn't be discounted, particularly in the current environment.

"Companies are facing enormous pressures to cut costs," Desai says. "This is such an unprecedented economic event."

Desai finds cost considerations have motivated companies to move to, or at least consider, solutions like those offered by GlobalEnglish, even in organizations where learners prefer classroom learning.

"A lot of the paradigms are being shifted," Desai says.

At the same time, it's important to realize that even though fiscal concerns factor heavily into today's business decisions, electing to delay training may not be an option.

Desai tells *HRWire* that the need for English language instruction has become a necessity for many organizations, from a user or employee perspective and from a corporate position.

Companies in almost every industry, from high tech to steel and industrial manufacturing to pharmaceuticals, have felt the impact of globalization and the communication challenges it presents.

The world 20 years ago isn't the world of today, Desai says. Even local companies that have global ambitions understand the need to communicate in a common language, he says.

And that language is English.

"Learning English isn't about learning a language. It's opening a door to opportunity and to being successful," Desai tells *HRWire*.

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