EDCI 531

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**Case Study: Behaviorism**

*Description*

Quantum Bits is a retail computer chain store that sells computers and other small computing devices. In addition to selling merchandise, the retail stores offer services for repairing their computers and receive training on their devices and included software. The company has employees in each store that specialize in selling (“Associates”), repairing (“Doctors”) and/or training (“Trainer”). Each of these positions requires specialized training provided by the company. The company invests a lot of time and money to train the Trainers to be very knowledgeable about the products and the software and to be excellent facilitators of their customers’ learning experiences. It is a rather coveted position in the store.

Customers can purchase a membership to the training program called “Quantum Leap.” Members of the Quantum Leap service make appointments for sessions up to two weeks in advance. An appointment lasts for one hour and is spent having a personal learning experience on the topic of the customer’s choice. The customer typically comes to the store, checks in for their appointment and is seen by the assigned Trainer at the scheduled time.

The issue for this case study comes when a customer cancels or doesn’t show up for their appointment and the Trainer becomes free for the rest of the allotted training hour.  During this unexpected “off time,” Trainers are expected to help out customers and other employees by selling merchandise or repairing devices. Both of these activities (selling and repairing) take place on the sales floor.  Not surprisingly, Trainers would rather come to the break-room and watch YouTube, text their friends, play games on their phone or hang out with those that really are on a sanctioned 15 minute break or lunch hour.

Firstly, the customer is negatively affected because there aren’t enough appointments available for their repairs. Secondly, able “Doctors” and “Associates” are expected to help out the training team when needed. If this behavior is not reciprocated by the Trainers, and they don’t “pay back” the other teams, the balance of the store budget for labor hours has been negatively affected.

Finally, the rest of the store employees see this “off time” as a privilege that only Trainers have.  For a while, the rest of the team saw this as really cool and everyone wanted to be a Trainer because they got to “goof off”.  Now it has started to create resentment - “how come they get to do that and I don’t?”  “Associates” would much rather create a career path toward becoming a “Doctor” instead of a “Trainer,” which hurts the store in building the bench strength it needs to operate well.

*Reflective Questions*

1. Are there any incentives for the Trainer to go out on the sales floor and sell merchandise or repair products?
2. Are there any negative consequences if they use their non-training time for personal gain? If so, what are they?
3. How does the trainer benefit from not doing their job as expected?
4. Are there any obstacles in the way of their not doing their job?
5. Has the job description changed from when they started?
6. Do they know how to sell and repair?

*Potential Solutions*

* One potential solution would be based on the behaviorist principle of extinction *(Driscoll, Psychology of Learning for Instruction, p. 42).* In order to gain stimulus control *(Driscoll, Just the Facts 101 e-Study Guide p. 27)* and decrease the probability of the undesirable behavior of breaking instead of working, we could remove the computers in the break room and any connections to the Internet that currently exist (stimuli). The break room could become a “no-technology zone,” thus removing the temptation altogether.
* Set the expectations for behavioral goals and appropriate reinforcers *(Driscoll, Psychology of Learning for Instruction p. 52)*. Set up a meeting between Management and Trainers to clarify and set the expectations of the current job role. Have the Trainers agree to these expectations or encourage them to find another job.
* If the desired behavior is being shown, reinforce it by sharing positive feedback from customers at intermittent, varied intervals of time *(Driscoll, Psychology, pp. 50-52).* This will become a “conditioned reinforcer” *(Driscoll, Psychology, p. 38)* because it appeals to the Trainers’ egos and sense of self-worth. This scenario of gathering positive feedback from customers also provides us with the empirical data to evaluate and measure the success of the behavior modification *(Driscoll, Psychology, p.54)*.
* Positive feedback will also come from Management by “cueing a learned behavior” *(Driscoll, Psychology, p. 39)*, specifically by saying “thank you for getting out there and helping out the rest of the team.” When this reward is determined to be effective, we are able to “water what works” *(Mager & Pipe, Analyzing Performance Problems, p. 70)* with positive reinforcement, thereby “strengthening the likelihood” of the desired performance *(p. 87).*
* If the Trainers feel they don’t have the knowledge base to sell or repair products, make sure they have access to the same training their co-workers had in order to do their job properly and with confidence. This should give them pride in their job or “intrinsic motivation” as Driscoll calls it *(Driscoll, Psychology, p. 65)*, expand their marketable skills and remove any obstacles in their way of doing a good job.
* Set up a reward system *(like Driscoll’s “Token economy” in Psychology, pp. 57-58)*. If the Trainers are able to use their cancellation times wisely by giving back to the team on a consistent basis, offer the reward of being in charge of writing their own schedule for a week.
* Have the Trainers be accountable to each other and to Management by being responsible for taking sanctioned breaks on time. In addition, it would be advantageous to ask permission and check in with a Manager at the start of their two breaks in the day.
* Finally, ask the Trainers if they think they are using their “free time” efficiently. Are they aware of the use of their time? If they are using the time to train themselves for their own personal gain, make sure they get that time by scheduling it in at specific times that don’t negatively impact the business. Also have them be specific about what they will be training on and the method in which they will proceed. The training topic they choose should not only be interesting to the Trainer, but also be in an area that satisfies a business need within the context of the store.