

Best practices for knowledge sharing programs

While Oliver Stone's *Wall Street* character Gordon Gekko may have proclaimed that "Lunch is for wimps," many companies have realized that lunch is actually **for learners**. One organization was able to increase lunch'n'learns from 69 sessions and 763 attendees per quarter to 180+ sessions and 2700 attendees by rebooting them as peer-to-peer learning! Clearly the demand for these opportunities is strong.

Here are a few things to think about while optimizing your lunch'n'learn programs:

Measuring success

How important is the dissemination of knowledge to the success of your company? In many industries - technology, pharma, aerospace, etc. - information sharing is foundational to problem solving and innovation. Why not develop knowledge-sharing goals and objectives for your team? You can bring attention to this important activity by setting targets for each employee, such as hosting at least one lunch'n'learn for the team per quarter. Targets might also rise with an employee's seniority, so that managers are required to host and attend the most sessions.

Screen for "sharers"

Great collaborative organizations purposefully recruit collaborative candidates. Encourage your interviewers to ask potential new hires about their feelings about, desire for, and prior participation in knowledge sharing initiatives. What have they learned from past colleagues, and have they welcomed the opportunity to share their own expertise? Conversely, showcase your own lunch'n'learn culture to attract top talent!

We all work in marketing

People won't attend a lunch'n'learn if they're not aware it exists. It's important to remember that these knowledge sharing sessions are not your employees' top priority, but it's equally important to remind them of L&D's long-term value. Marketing may not be your core skill set, but don't forget this important aspect of knowledge-sharing success! Simple posters, periodic email blasts, or a friendly reminder at the coffee station - simple marketing techniques can help ensure good attendance.

Collect and leverage that value

The presentations, handouts, questions, and discussions associated with a lunch'n'learn session are valuable assets that should be recorded. The information should be made available for others who couldn't attend or colleagues that join the team at a later date. Much like other key processes within your company, seek out technology to help manage this important part of your informal learning program. Ideal solutions should enable your employees to easily schedule these sessions, facilitate registration, and also support the recording and organization of content for re-use.

You can promote a culture of knowledge sharing and continuous growth with a few strategic tweaks to your company's lunch'n'learn approach. Once the infrastructure is in place, information can flow more freely within and between teams for greater collaboration and value-generating innovation.