

## Training: No Budget, No Cry

Steve Ressler | February 27, 2013



Let me guess — your training/education budget doubled this year? All right, I can hear you laughing from afar.

Yes, I know training budgets are cut, but that doesn't stop the need for a well trained and educated staff. Especially with rapidly evolving technology and the start of baby boomer retirements, the need is even more.

So how do you stay educated on the latest knowledge in your discipline? Lucky for you, there is a plethora of ways outside of standard in-person training. As Bob Marley essentially referenced in song: No budget, no cry.

Here are six solutions to solve training needs without singing the reggae budget blues.

### **1 / Technical Chops.**

Are you looking to advance your technical skills? Luckily there are lots of great free tools to improve your chops. Perhaps you want to learn a new programming language. Check out free lessons at Codecademy. Want to improve your foreign language skills to keep up with your rapidly diverse population? Learn with peers on the cool Duolingo app.

### **2 / Book Time with Experts.**

I'm kind of obsessed with the new site clarity.fm. Basically you can book time to talk with technology leaders on whatever topic you desire from product design to marketing. For example, I spent 30 minutes with a leader at babycenter.com on how that company optimizes its audience and email strategies. Yes, you pay a small charge per minute, but that 30 minutes was more useful than weeks of training on email marketing. Find ways you can book time with experts in your field, whether outside consultants or mentors.

### **3 / Big Picture.**

Want to think big? Massive open enrollment courses are all the rage. Simply stated, there are four- to eight-week online college courses where you have 50,000-150,000 peers in the same class. Take free courses from great college professors on topics like gamification, microeconomics for managers or leading strategic innovation in an organization with professors from places like the University of Virginia and University of Michigan at Coursera.

### **4 / Take a Field Trip.**

My favorite learning experiences in government have involved field trips. Take a half-dozen key officials to visit another agency or company and share best practices. Maybe it's a walk-through of an operation or simply two hours of executives asking questions. You'll learn a lot, plus it gets the whole team on the same page. Extra credit: have some assigned readings on the company before the field trip.

### **5 / Wonk Time.**

As a government employee, sometimes you just want focused training on your job and mission. Government is a unique beast, and you want government-focused training. You want tactical tips from other government agencies or case studies from other cities and states. Fortunately there are many public-sector-focused free trainings available from monthly online trainings at GovLoop to great webcasts by Government Technology, the International City/County Management Association and others.

### **6 / Do It Yourself.**

How about a little DIY? Organize your own training — set up a regular lunch and learning session at your agency. Have leaders from your agency speak, or bring in local experts from a university or other department. And technology makes it easy — line up some good speakers and have them call in via Skype. Pick a county across the country or invite an author (call me maybe?).

It is often stated that “your employees are your No. 1 asset.” Well, start acting like it — invest in training and educating your team. Regardless of budget constraints, there are myriad opportunities to increase your learning rate, and the return is enormous. It just takes a little time and effort.