

# Leverage Subject Matter Experts

You know your company has them, but do you know how to get the most from your subject matter experts? **BY KENDRA LEE**



**Kendra Lee** is president of KLA Group. Specializing in the IT industry, KLA Group helps companies rapidly penetrate new markets, break into new accounts, and shorten time to revenue with new products.

Effective trainers must be able to break through the SME (Subject Matter Expert) wall to access the expert knowledge they hold. SMEs are the golden key to training and tools that deliver the results their clients expect. However, it often isn't easy to tap into all a SME has to offer.

There are four "Critical Paths" to success:

## 1. SET EXPECTATIONS

As a first step, SMEs must fully understand the objectives of the training project. By providing SMEs with information about why the company believes the training is important, and how they can help, it will make them more accommodating to the entire process. Clearly define the vision of the project, as well as the required timelines, the key players, the audience, the SMEs' role and responsibility, and the final deliverables. Doing so will go a long way toward fully engaging the SMEs in the process.

## 2. ESTABLISH A RELATIONSHIP

One of the foremost challenges in working with SMEs is getting their feedback. It's important to establish a relationship of communication and trust, and the onus is on you to do so. Be open about expectations and goals, and inform SMEs about why their role is important to the final outcome. Don't expect that a project plan and timelines will be enough. Follow up and keep the process with SMEs on track. By doing so, SMEs will come to trust you and the process.

## 3. COMMUNICATE REGULARLY

Provide regular updates (on a weekly or

bi-monthly basis depending on the length and priority of the project), follow up on questions or concerns, and volunteer ways you may be of assistance to SMEs. When communicating with SMEs, be clear about your needs, and follow up on more than one occasion.

## 4. GIVE SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT

To maximize SMEs' expertise, it's your job to support them throughout the process. For example, if a SME provides graphics and charts that aren't entirely impressive, find a way to improve them. If a SME is asked to train, but he isn't a skilled trainer, work with him on presentation skills by sharing speaking tips and

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techniques of your own. Make the SME a star, and he will support you on this project and others to come.

These "Critical Paths" can help to avoid the frustration a SME may be feeling and help your training project deliver the business results you—and your client—are targeting. **■**

For more information, contact KLA Group at 303.741.6636 or [info@klagroup.com](mailto:info@klagroup.com) or visit [www.klagroup.com](http://www.klagroup.com).