

What Our Trainer Members Can Teach Us: An Interview with Gail See of Dakota Supply Group

Company training leaders and trainers come from many backgrounds with varying levels of learning and development (L&D) experience. While not all have degrees in L&D, they most certainly have a passion for helping others to grow. This passion will manifest itself in many ways - through building useful new employee orientation programs, implementing an LMS to allow ease of access to training, or ensuring professional development is an integral part of a company's and employee's growth plan.

Part of the ASA Education Foundation's mission is to serve members in all walks of life at their business, from members who have an established training program, to members who are just taking the plunge into training.

ASA University team members are always talking to members about what's working, what's not, and how ASA resources can assist with achieving training results at their organization.

Kathleen Treadway, Program Development Manager for ASA University, recently sat down with **Gail See, Learning and Development Specialist at Dakota Supply Group**, to find out more about the strategies her organization is using to further training, including support from ASA University.

Gail has worked in her role with Dakota Supply Group since 2021, and has motivated and inspired employees to take ownership of their professional growth by providing them with training tools, resources, and opportunities within our industry.

Along with the many hats Gail and all trainers may wear, they must stay up to date with training advancements to adapt to ever-evolving learner needs and business growth. When Gail started with DSG, the training approach was reactive, and task-based. A confusing labyrinth of portals and vendors constituted their training approach, with no clear way of tying learning outcomes together.

We asked Gail See, L&D Specialist at Dakota Supply Group, what she would visualize if she had a magic wand to wave over her training program:



"I would invest in a full-scale, in-person training facility so that employees can learn and practice skills in a real environment, with real customers!"

In this perfect branch location, employees would have time, resources, and access to mentoring to learn the critical skills of their role.

Employees could cross-train under the guidance of experienced, passionate mentors.

This multi-functional space could also be a testing ground for best practices, adoption of new technology, and a place where customers are asked to provide feedback on DSG service."

Leaders in the company recognized that the individualized approach was not sustainable as DSG grew.

Their solution: their own learning management system. Gail was given the green light to implement an LMS to streamline curriculum and provide consistency and accountability organization wide. Using technology to assist with learning goals can be a major game-changer, as it was for Gail and DSG.

Within the LMS, Gail included training courses from associations like ASA University, and assigned training paths to all employees based on their role. She worked to ensure there was a vision for how the LMS would be used and how employees would engage. “Now that the LMS is here I notice that training requests are more specific than before, instead of hearing, ‘we need training’, I now receive requests for specific skills missing from our training plans. This helps me fill training gaps efficiently and continuously improve the curriculum,” Gail shared.

Six months after implementation, almost 100% of DSG employees are engaging in the LMS and taking ownership of their development independently. That is a huge win! In talking with Gail, it became apparent that connecting training outcomes to sales successes is a big long-term goal for DSG. “Training engagement has always been high at DSG and the implementation of the LMS allows us to be proactive in our assignment of training paths so needed courses are accessible at exactly the right moment,” says Gail.

Building a strong training program does not come without challenges. One of those challenges for Gail is the over-reliance on videos alone for employees to learn a skill. Putting a course in an LMS does not alone make for a good training experience. Employees who watch a video to learn a new skill often become overconfident in their abilities and forget that failing is a critical part of the learning process.

At Dakota Supply Group, Gail combated this challenge by looking for meaningful ways to incorporate practice and feedback into training to help it “stick”. There are many options available when looking for professional development opportunities. Gail chose to incorporate ASA’s best-in-class industry training into her employee development to provide a solid foundation for employees new to the industry.

Gail also recognized the need to develop future leaders at her organization and to retain top talent. DSG enrolled high potential employees in the ASA Master of Distribution Management (MDM) program, and the skills they learned are continually in use as they reach for their professional goals at DSG.

DSG also takes advantage of ASA networking and training events such as the Women in Industry “ELEVATE” & Emerging Leaders “EMERGE” conferences to gain critical knowledge and skills that benefit



our industry. Most recently, Gail attended ASA University's Trainer's Best Practice Forum and connected with trainers and peers across the industry to share their successes and challenges.

We hope this brief peek behind the training curtain for Dakota Supply Group and the experiences of Gail See gives you some ideas to help you or your training program grow and be successful. There will be many challenges along the way, but also many opportunities. Passion for helping others learn and grow is a key component to that success. But don't judge your progress on that of others. Everyone and every company has a definition for growth and success. Create a vision. Develop a plan. Implement with passion. Good luck with your own learning journey!