



## Training wheels in montion?

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While a recent study suggests that training budgets nationally remain flat, in Connecticut multiple companies say they are seeing increased activity as employers continue to hold off hiring in favor of widening the skills of existing workers.

"If you take a look at the companies with more than 500 employees, you would find that most of those firms over the past 10 years had built up internal training regimes ... only to have those operations cut to the bone," said David Lewis, CEO of OperationsInc, a human resources consulting company in Stamford that developed a wide-ranging training offering. "The staff got smaller, and now the workloads have gotten to the level they had before but the work forces have not returned to their previous levels ... A lot of people thrown into roles and situations for which they were not trained."

In a survey published last November by Training Magazine, three in four corporate training managers said their budgets had stayed flat or decreased. Danbury-based Cartus Corp. was the lone company to make the annual Training 125 list published this month by the magazine; in Westchester County, N.Y., MasterCard Inc. also made the list.

Of course, training budgets and hours can spike or crater due to major company events, such as the start or completion of the integration of an acquired business, the hiring or firing of large numbers of workers or the introduction of a major new product line or software system.

In its recent annual report, United Rentals Inc. stated that while it cut its work force by 6 percent in 2010, it slashed the total training hours undergone by its workers by a full 20 percent.

In a recent conference call with investment analysts, People's United Financial Inc. CEO Jack Barnes noted an increase in training as a result of a small string of acquisitions made by the Bridgeport-based bank.

New Britain-based Stanley Black & Decker, meanwhile, is rolling out a new fulfillment system that is already in the hands of 200 of the tool giant's senior-most managers, who are now immersed in learning the nuts and bolts of the system even as they carry on their regular duties. Stanley Black & Decker is readying to roll out the system to the rest of its employee base that will use it, according to CEO John Lundgren in a

conference call. He said it took as much as a year for the system to really gain traction as users were brought up to speed.

"There's a heck of a lot of training," Lundgren said. "We are providing robust online materials, as well as making it a focal point of things like the national sales meetings ... when they're all together any way at the same place at the same time.

"Folks have embraced it," Lundgren added. "The whole objective in emphasizing it is, can we get an even faster start? Can we gain traction in three months as opposed to, say, six to nine or 12, which is what it took us before?"

And of course, major shifts in the business landscape are also impacting budgets, from financial companies attempting to grapple with the onslaught of the Dodd-Frank financial reform bill, to companies large and small aiming to capitalize on still-emerging opportunities using social media.

Ken McGee, a vice president with Stamford-based Gartner Inc., is advising chief information officers to devote fully half of their training budgets to immersing their companies in social media – including training on social sciences like cognitive psychology.

For his part, OperationInc's Lewis said companies are flocking fastest to his programs on entry-level management and on interviewing job candidates, perhaps a hopeful sign for renewed growth – though an interesting dynamic is already apparent.

"There is so much being offered to the unemployed on how to interview successfully," Lewis said. "We are almost breeding professional candidates who are better trained (to conduct interviews) than the person who is hiring them."