

How to Train New Employees

Author:
Michael K. Swan, Washington State University

Reviewers:
Diane Jackman, Eastern Illinois University
Gary Thome, Riverland Community College

Introduction

No matter how carefully an owner or manager recruits and selects employees, they will not come to their new jobs with all the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities. Training is essential if employees are to reach their ultimate potential. Training should help employees feel like they are important in helping the operation accomplish its goals.

Training is anything an employer does to help employees learn to do their work the way the employer wants them to do it. Training is an investment in people benefiting both the employer and employee. In an ideal employer-employee situation, the investment in training allows an employee to do the job better. Doing the job better benefits both the employee and the operation. Trainers are challenged to understand what the employees know from previous training and experience. Trainers need to see the job through the eyes of the employees. Good training makes complicated and complex tasks seem simple.

Conditions that Facilitate Learning

Every operation should have a plan for training new employees. The plan should include creation of a positive environment for learning. Reinforcing the following assumptions in each trainer and employee helps create an ideal learning situation:

1. All employees can learn.
2. Learning should be made an active process.
3. Learners need and want guidance and direction.
4. Learning should be sequential.
5. Learners need time to practice.
6. Learning should be varied to avoid boredom.
7. Learners gain satisfaction from their learning.
8. Correct learner behavior should be reinforced.
9. Learning does not occur at a steady rate.
10. Learning should be continuous.

Principles of Job Training

Job instruction can be divided into getting ready to train and training. Trainers are often so experienced in what they are teaching that taking time to prepare for training seems like a waste of time. "I don't have time to prepare" or "I know this job so well I don't need to think about how to teach it" may be foolish attitudes. Muddled and confused instruction increases the time spent on training and causes frustration for both trainer and employee.

Two important questions guide preparation for training.

1. What is the objective of the training? Define specifically what the learners are to know or be able to do at the conclusion of the training. An acceptable level of performance and timetable for the training should be established.
2. What are the principal steps in the task and in what sequence should they be done? Analyzing each task can be helpful. Develop tips on how the job can be made easier, done more quickly or done with less frustration for the employee.
3. Be open to suggestions an employee may have learned at a previous job that may be beneficial to incorporate into the training.

Having answered these two questions, the trainer is ready to prepare equipment, materials, learning aids and the place for the actual training. Looking for equipment or supplies during training leaves the learner suspicious that the teacher is careless or incompetent or both.

The actual training can be aided by a five step teaching method:

1. **PREPARE** the learner. Learners are prepared when they are at ease, understand why they need to learn the task, are interested in learning, have the confidence that they can learn and the trainer can teach. The most important part of learner preparation is creating a need to know or desire to learn on the part of the trainee. Pre-training requests from employee such as safety, first aid video or slides, and operation manuals should be offered.
2. **TELL** the learner about each step of the task.
3. **SHOW** the learner how to do each step of the task (flow plan of operation). In demonstrating the specific task, explain each step emphasizing the key points and more difficult steps. Remember the little and seemingly simple parts of the task. Get the learner involved by asking questions about what is being shown.
4. Have the learner **DO** each step of the task while being observed by the trainer and then without the trainer observing. Ask the learner to explain each step as it is performed. If steps of the task are omitted, re-explain the steps and have the learner repeat them.
5. **REVIEW** each step of the task with the learner, offering encouragement, constructive criticism and additional pointers on how to do the job. Be frank in the appraisal. Encourage the learner toward self appraisal.

Peer Training

What are the benefits of peer training new employees? These are the most important results:

- **We get to know each other sooner.** If only one person from a team or department does all the training for a new hire, there's little time for getting to know the other team members. With peer training, the new person gets acquainted with his or her new colleagues very quickly.
- **The new person gets better training.** No one person on a team knows everything about a particular job function. Training-by-committee gives the new employee a chance to pick everyone's brain and to hear different points of view about the best ways to get things done.
- **The training doesn't depend on a single person.** If you put all your training eggs in one employee's basket, what happens when that super-trainer is out of the office or leaves the business? Usually the training suffers. By spreading the training duties around, it is easier to pick up the slack when someone is unavailable.

Training Plan Template

Staff	Job/Position Title	Competency	Related Training (title, location)	Timeline	Status
Betty	Manager, Farrowing Barn	Processing Pigs	Conference Room	30 minutes	Ready
John	Feeding Manager	Feeding Schedule	Conference Room	15 minutes	In process