

Elements of Effective Training

Ongoing employee development is vital to company success and is a sign of a well-managed organization. This article provides some basic elements and guidelines for developing, implementing, and improving management and employee educational and training programs.

Establish Training Needs

Each organization has its own specific tasks and required skills that are essential to the entity's mission. If, for example, safety is one of the required skills, then training may involve regulatory compliance issues – such as procedures mandated by OSHA, DOT, or NFPA – and company rules with the objective of creating an awareness of specific job exposures, hazards, and job-specific loss trends. To establish the appropriate safety skills, it is necessary to list each task, the hazards and Risk Controls associated with the task, and the equipment and action needed to reduce or eliminate the exposures and/or the hazards. The process of associating specific skills with specific tasks will reveal and simplify the various training requirements for each employee.

Elements of Training

Each job consists of a series of tasks that are conducted under various conditions and to generally accepted standards, including safety standards. The instructor should define each task, state the objective of that task (i.e., why it is performed), and specify the conditions and time(s) under which the task should or should not be performed. This is especially important for new employees. Include what methods to use with each condition or task-related variable. State to what criteria the company will require the task to be performed, e.g., OSHA or DOT standards. Where there are no generally accepted standards, provide guidelines and clearly communicate the reason for each guideline. If the task can be divided into a series of sub-tasks, consider presenting the instruction at the sub-task level. Even the simplest task can be broken down into numerous basic steps. Wherever possible, provide written material to each student-employee to allow each individual to review the material at a later time to enhance retention.

Methods of Teaching

The retention of instructional material months after the training is conducted depends on how the material is learned. For maximum retention, a combination of teaching techniques is recommended. Where only one method is used, the amount of material retained is:

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| • Lecture style presentation | 10–20% |
| • Demonstration | 35% |
| • Student Practice | 70% |
| • Coaching with hands-on activity | 90% |

Tips for Effective Training

Instructor Preparation:

1. Know your topic. The instructor must know the subject matter thoroughly. Study, and rehearse presenting the material. Document your lesson plan.
2. Confirm the time, location, and number of employees attending the training session. Pick a quiet and comfortable location that is good for training and conducive for learning.
3. Test equipment before the session. Have a back-up plan should equipment fail.

4. Pass out paper copies of the material to help students follow the presentation, aid retention, and serve as backup should the training equipment malfunction.
5. Report to the training site one hour before the session to set up and test equipment and make last minute adjustments.
6. Have a sign-in sheet and pens/pencils present.
7. Use a variety of training aids: lecture, audio-visuals, whiteboards, computer displays, hands-on demonstrations. Encourage student participation and demonstration.

Conducting the Session:

1. Dress neatly and in a professional manner.
2. Begin session with a sincere and enthusiastic welcome and introduction.
3. Give a very brief description of your experience; explain the purpose of the training; and let the class know what will be expected of them.
4. Make administrative announcements, e.g., where the exits are, where to meet in the event of an evacuation, when there will be a break, where the restrooms are. Request that cell phones be turned off or put in vibration mode.
5. Provide an outline of the session, basic time lines, and procedures.
6. Be enthusiastic! This is very important to the success of the session.
7. Use a variety of teaching techniques to make the class more interesting and to help with student retention of the material being covered.
8. Use guest speakers and on-line resources when appropriate.
9. Involve the class. Ask questions and keep good eye contact. Ask a question; pause for a moment; and then call for a response. This will keep the class alert.
10. Check on the learning process by giving a written or oral test or by having each student demonstrate his or her understanding and proficiency.
11. Obtain a written evaluation from all participants after the session; use their ideas and comments for future training and improvement.

Effectiveness

Training effectiveness is a measure of the outcome of the training. To measure the outcome, the instructor or a manager must evaluate whether or not the students understood the topics presented and are able to demonstrate their ability to perform the tasks in the manner covered in the training program, and to do so to the standards or guidelines discussed and/or demonstrated in the program while attaining the objectives of those tasks. When appropriate, each student-employee should be individually evaluated. The student's attendance, training, and demonstrated proficiency should be documented, and a written evaluation placed in the employee's personnel file, especially if the training is mandatory.

Tips for Effective Implementation

Conducting training on any specific subject will not automatically ensure that the employee will use that training in the performance of the tasks assigned to him or her. It takes continued follow-up by supervision and management, with support from top management, to ensure persistent adherence to the training and standards.

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