



Training the New Kid on the Block

People want to know how to perform their job properly. Education is basic. Most will agree that it is better to do the job right the first time. Redoing work is a waste of resources, as are injuries. Just as your employees need to know how to assemble a widget, they need to know how to do it in such a manner that they will not be injured. This is the purpose of training.

The New Hire

A study in one state found that 30% of the industrial accidents involved employees with less than one year experience on the job. Of these, 20% of the injuries happened during the first month, 17% during the second month, and 15% during the third. A study by the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that 48% of the injuries occurred during the first year. Forty percent of these happened to workers in their twenties. Twenty-nine percent involved workers in their 30s. Sixteen percent occurred to workers in their 40s. This tells us two things. New hires and young workers are at increased risk of injury.

The Younger Worker

So, why do the younger workers tend to be hurt more often? Several reasons have been proposed.

- Young workers may not have had the chance to develop the ability to sense a hazardous situation. Often times we hear, “They should have used their common sense!” Common sense is based on experience. If someone does not have the experience with a certain situation or activity, they are not going to have “common sense.”
- Younger workers may exhibit a lack of concentration. Anyone who has a child knows their attention span is much shorter than that of most adults. Although your employee may be old enough to be considered an adult, their attention span may still be short. In addition, the job at hand may not be the younger employee’s primary interest. Often people in their late teens or early 20s are experiencing many new social opportunities. These can be the primary interests occupying their mind — not their work.
- Risk taking is characteristic of younger people. They are proving to themselves and others that they are not afraid of anything. In addition, they may not have had the experience to know they should be afraid.
- Many young people find it difficult to ask for help. This is part of human nature. They are eager to please, and they do not want to appear ignorant. When the trainer takes the role of guide, rather than authority figure, the student is a fully participative (as opposed to passive) learner.

How to Train Properly

Often, we hear that the new hire receives “on-the-job training.” While personal experience can be a good teacher, it does come with a price. While the new hire is trying to figure out how to do the job properly, he or she is more likely to become injured. “On-the-job training” can be nothing more than throwing the person to the wolves. Real training has specific objectives along with a strategy for achieving the objectives. To be effective, specific steps must be taken. These steps are:

1. Know Your Trainees

- What is the age range of the trainees?

- What is their previous work experience?
- What previous related training have they had?
- What is their education level?
- What is their primary language?
- What knowledge do they need?
- What skills should they acquire in the training?

Answers to these basic questions will guide you through developing the next part of the training plan.

2. Establish the Training Format

Given the people you have to train, what is the most effective way to go about it? If the trainees have no subject knowledge and no application experience, you will need to be an *instructor*. You will need to teach the trainees how to perform the job starting with the very basics. At this level, the classroom setting may be the most effective.

If the trainees have some knowledge, but need more, along with some application skills, then your position may be that of a *coach*. As a coach, you may not be teaching the basics, but you are developing the knowledge base and working to expand the trainees' existing application skills. This type of training may still need to be done in a classroom but arranged in a less formal setting.

Training is not only necessary for the new hire. Let's now say the trainee has the necessary knowledge and skills, but makes mistakes. Your role as a supervisor may change during the training period with new workers. One of the first changes may be that of a *facilitator*. A facilitator works with people in more of a hands-on role to help them identify and correct their own problems. They don't give all the answers, but provide guidance for the trainee so they can discover on their own as you give the guidance. Motivate students to learn and offer yourself as a resource.

Finally, you have a group that has good knowledge and application skills, but now needs to learn a new process, procedure or machine. You may wish to assume the role of *consultant*. In this position, you pass on your special knowledge; but if done right, you should expect intelligent questions and comments about your subject from this group. Once you have identified your group and decided on the most effective training format, it is time to move to the next planning step.

3. Establish Learning Objectives

This is the heart of the whole training process. What are the trainees doing, what should they be doing, or what are they capable of doing, given their current level of knowledge and application skills? Answer these three questions:

- What do I want the trainees to be able to do?
- What are the conditions under which I want them to perform?
- How well must they perform in order for me to be satisfied?

When these questions have been answered, you are ready to:

4. Select the Best Training Technique

There are many different techniques that can be used. Using the wrong technique may render the time spent training as useless. For example, imagine trying to teach someone to weld by having them sit in a classroom-style lecture. They may walk out with technical knowledge, but will surely have trouble striking an arc.

Time and space precludes going into all of the different types of training techniques that can be used. However, as a rule of thumb, if you are looking to impart technical knowledge, classroom sessions may be best. If you are looking to impart skills, a hands-on environment is usually the most effective. Whatever the format, you should rehearse the timing to know how long the training presentation will take.

5. Organize Your Content

Planning and organization will help maximize the chance of success. Now it is time to take each step you have made in the past and pull it together. To make the process easier, follow these steps:

- **Plan how you will set the tone of the session.** How do you want the attendees to perceive you? How will you set each of them aside as an individual?
- **Define the learning objectives for the session.** Share these objectives with the trainees at the beginning. Be specific; relate it to their work; give the trainees clear expectations for the session.
- **Develop an agenda for the session.** Outline your topics and set time limits to keep the session on track.
- **Select an appropriate visual aid for the session.** These can be used to highlight key points or help in visualization. The eye helps the ear understand. Use a variety of training aids.
- **Develop handout materials.** These have to be used carefully. You want them to enhance, not distract from your presentation.
- **Plan a participant activity.** This could involve a demonstration of what they have learned, a discussion or a quiz.
- **Be sure to follow up.** Training does not end when the session is over. Meet with or monitor the attendees' performance to make certain that the training was understood and that it is being applied properly.
- **Obtain an evaluation of the session.** You may find you need to make changes in the planning steps outlined above or your approach to the people or subject matter. Evaluations are a great tool to improve *your* skills to train others in the future.

Train Adults as Adults

There is a difference in the way children and adults learn. A successful trainer knows that adults (even more as they age):

- Pursue accuracy rather than the speed of the information delivered.
- Have increased self-reliance and self-direction. They're more likely to feel they are right, rather than the trainer.

- Underestimate their ability to learn and retain information.
- Increasingly rely on prior knowledge and experience.
- Are less flexible and are more apt to be set in their ways.
- Experience a decline in short-term memory while long-term memory increases.
- Have decreased hearing and vision ability.
- Have lower energy levels and lower reaction speeds.

There is little question, training costs money. But the real question is how much does an untrained workforce cost?

Prudent people subscribe to the old adage: *An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.*
Would you rather spend your limited resources teaching someone how to do the job properly or would you rather spend that resource, and more, paying for injury, disability, repairing damage and redoing work?

