

Help your employees learn with on-the-job training 67

BY CAROLYN B. THOMPSON

Many companies believe that if there are no funds available for formal training, on-the-job training is a logical choice because it's free. The truth is, nothing is free, including on-the-job training. The employee who is doing the training and the employee who is learning are not producing the product you manufacture. During the learning process, the trainer and the trainee are consuming materials and sometimes even breaking them.

When companies use experienced trainers who are skilled in helping people learn the job, however, they find that on-the-job training can prove to be inexpensive and saves more time than other types of training.

Planning and preparing on-the-job training

Planning for on-the-job training begins by focusing on what the employee needs to learn (the outcome) and how the employee learns best. Decide what training format works best in each individual situation. Figure out how to keep an employee's interest during training, whether that involves using visual aids, exercises or other options to create and maintain an open learning environment.

Prepare for your on-the-job training program by asking these questions:

- What company benefits are you looking for from this training?
- What specific information will you use to convince people in your organization that the time and money invested in structured on-the-job training will pay off?
- Who in your organization could become a great trainer?

Common mistakes

Don't fall into the trap of believing that on-the-job training equals off-the-cuff training. Here are some potential pitfalls you should try to avoid when implementing an on-the-job training program at your facility:

Pitfall #1: No one designs a comprehensive training plan that includes activities, task lists, performance standards, procedure manuals and descriptions.

Pitfall #2: No one plans to have the necessary tools or materials available (i.e. someone else is using the computer, or the procedure manual is outdated).

Pitfall #3: Trainers only demonstrate and discuss the job with the trainee. They don't provide the learner with any other learning methods, including case studies, role playing and practice.

Pitfall #4: The trainer conducts the training in a chaotic manner and gives information in units that are too large for the trainee to absorb and retain reasonably, leaving the trainee feeling overwhelmed.

Deciding who should train

Finally, decide who should be your on-the-job trainer or trainers. The person's title or relationship to the trainee, whether supervisor, co-worker or outsider, is meaningless. Choose the person with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to be successful helping people learn on-the-job. Carefully select the trainer, because employees will turn to this person over and over again for help. It's also vital that someone is responsible for overseeing the planning, implementation and follow up of on-the-job training.

In planning your on-the-job training program, you will use many of the same processes you use for manufacturing your products, including planning, implementing, evaluating results and planning to improve. You would never skip one of these steps, so make sure you follow them to help your employees learn on the job.

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