Keys to Effective Employee Training

By Davon Cook

In last month's column Invest in Training, I asked you to reflect on your organization's training and learning strategy. This time we'll take a deeper look into how to set up your own internal training.

"Training" conjures up an image of a group of people sitting in a meeting room all day with manuals in front of them. On-the-job learning, with one individual showing another how to do the task is likely more common in your organization. I suggest you may need a combination of the two approaches—although without the boring meeting-room stereotype!

First, consider the size of the training meeting. Pairing a trainee one-on-one with an experienced operator is an obvious way to teach how to operate a piece of machinery, or to complete a software task. Yet group meetings may work well to provide overview information to get the team on the same page, or for topics where it's important for all to hear consistent instructions.

Second, regardless of group size or situation, realize that individuals have different learning styles. Some learn best by listening, some by reading, some by touching and doing, some by writing. For example, I need to write things down to commit to memory. I may never go back to look at the notes, but it helps me process the information.

Given those different styles, be intentional about varying your communication style based on the size of your audience. If addressing a group, provide a handout for note-takers to annotate, provide visual examples as you explain and, ideally, provide a tactical opportunity to try it. A client recently created a table-top field layout and used toy tractors to explain the reasoning behind GPS layout for planting.

For an individual to whom you are demonstrating a task, *ask* how they learn best and then adapt your method. Invite them to take notes if they wish. Or, with my example in mind, don't assume that they cannot learn if they are *not* taking notes! Point out helpful sections in the user manual (or other written resources) for more information. Provide Standard Operating Procedures for repetitive, detailed tasks. Show them, then allow them to do it themselves while you observe.

Finally, remember that training is an *ongoing process*, not a one-time *event*—for two reasons. First, most of us won't retain all the information in one sitting. A business owner I work with shared that when he starts training a new operator, he intentionally doesn't share everything in the first session to avoid overwhelming them. He gives them just enough info to get started and plans to follow up with more time the next day and the next. Second, we are hopefully *life-long learners*. Information and technology and our businesses are constantly changing—there will be new skills and information we need tomorrow.

These tips will help you develop an effective employee-training program—a necessity in 2016!