

# Effective Training

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There is an old saying that goes, “If you don’t have time to do something right the first time, how are you going to find time to do it a second time?” That phrase might have well been coined with employee selection in mind. Turnover is a vicious cycle. It isn’t important that you find a person to fill a vacant position. It’s important that you find the right person to fill that position. If you don’t, chances are you’ll be filling that position again in a few weeks or, worse yet, dealing with an employee who isn’t well-suited for the position or the business. As a savvy manager once said, “It’s better to have a vacancy than to wish you had one.”

Likewise, hiring the correct person to fill a position is just half the battle. If you’re too busy to train the new employee, many experts would say that you’re too busy to hire. After all, the first few weeks on a job are akin to a child’s “formative years”. This is when the new hire will learn to walk in the steps of employees that have gone before him or her, learn to speak the business’s language, and come to understand the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable behavior. They will also use that time to gauge the business’s culture.

Don’t let minor mistakes by new employees turn into bad habits that you will have to spend months trying to correct, all the while worrying about the damage your criticism might be doing to your relationship with that employee. New employees expect training and development. They want people to help them learn to do things correctly the first way. Don’t let your hectic schedule keep you from investing the time into teaching and orienting a new employee from the very beginning of your relationship.

## **Lay out the details of the job**

### Job Analysis

A *job analysis* is the process of describing and recording aspects of the job. This step is absolutely crucial, as it details the work that is done through observations, interviews with other

employees, recommendations of experts, and work diaries. The focus of the job analysis should be answering basic questions. For example: will this person have to read, drive, lift, see, talk, listen, weld, calculate, stand, instruct, etc.?

The analysis should yield the following:

- the physical and intellectual requirements the employee must meet
- a comprehensive list of tasks to be performed
- an organizational chart detailing where the position fits into the overall operation.

### Job Specification

While the analysis results in understanding the aspects of the job, it is not sufficient for truly understanding what a qualified applicant should be like. The next step is to take the key tasks discovered in the job analysis and create a *job specification*—a list of the abilities, skills, knowledge, or licenses needed to do the job. An employer should take no skills for granted. If you are interested in hiring an individual who may have to mix and apply chemicals, do not be concerned merely with their physical capabilities and mechanical experience. You would also want to specify that a qualified applicant has adequate reading and mathematical skills.

Job specifications might include items like a valid driver's license, the ability to drive a tractor, welding capability, and the ability to stand or sit for long periods of time.

This process is vital for a number of reasons, not the least of which is legal. It is a common misconception that employers aren't allowed to discriminate—they are. In fact, business success may depend upon it. They just shouldn't discriminate against an applicant based on things that have nothing to do with the applicant's ability to perform the job (ie. race, age, gender, etc.) In case of a lawsuit, having a written job specification can help prove that the applicant was not discriminated against based on any of the protected classes but rather based on his or her suitability to the position.

### Job Description

In recent years, *job descriptions* have become very popular as valuable instruments of employee management. The job analysis and specifications are combined into a job description in order to give potential and current employees an accurate picture of the position. From employee recruitment and selection to performance evaluation and feedback, managers are using job descriptions to ensure that the business and the employee have the same perceptions of the position.

A job description is always subject to change. It should change and evolve with the business, position, and employee. It can be as detailed or general, as need be, as long as it conveys the requirements an employee will have to meet to be successful in the position.

### **No surprises—teach applicants about the business before hiring**

It is the employer's job to make sure that new hires aren't faced with too many surprises on the first day of work. Otherwise, the shock value alone of what they experience might be enough to make them leave. If an applicant has been warned of, or exposed to, certain aspects of the business, he or she will be prepared for what he or she may have to smell, hear, feel, or do the first day on the job. Or, better yet, the applicant might turn the position down and, in doing so, allow you to go on in search of an individual who is more likely to become a valued, long-term employee.

A job preview allows the potential employee to get a good feel for all aspects of the job and the business. A well-written job description helps, but you may add to this by having an open-house for potential employees and their families or allowing an applicant to “shadow” a current employee for part of the day. If possible, exposing applicants to current or former employees will help in this process. The idea is to keep a new employee from being surprised by an aspect of the job he or she was not prepared for. The job preview is your chance to sell the business. In a tight labor market, the employer is as much on trial as the applicant. Let them interview you. Remember that evaluation goes both ways. While the applicant might not get the job if he or she does not perform well, you might not get a great employee if you do not put your best foot forward too.

### **Training and Orientation**

The most important communication that happens in an employee's tenure with a business occurs within the first thirty days. That is when the employee learns the culture, practices, and philosophy of the business. Without full and complete training, most employees will fail. It is only a matter of time.

Of course, training is a time-consuming and frequently frustrating process. It is easy to ask a new employee to “shadow” current employees for a day or two, picking up key lessons along the way and then after a couple of weeks, call that person fully trained. However, that is not the best situation for the new employee or the business. It takes one full production cycle for an employee to see everything that is commonplace within the operation and one full year for him/her to experience the

seasonal differences that are common within agriculture. After all, the situations an employee encounters during the month of July may be very different than those he/she will see in February.

The most important part of training is not the process itself, but rather, the communication between managers, existing employees, and newer members of the team as to what is going on and what can be expected, especially during stressful periods. New employees will need and want to be in the loop, if only to understand what is happening and how it will affect them.

Consider the following six steps that will help any business to improve their training process.

#### 1. Establish a training and orientation schedule and plan

Who is going to give the new employee the tour? Who is going to teach the employee each of the new skills he/she will be expected to master? What is the timeline you are expecting to follow (ie. what skills do you expect the employee to have and by when?)

These are just a few of the questions a manager should ask before ever extending a job offer to a potential employee. Certainly, no one expects you to have a complex program laid out for the next six months. But at the very least, you should have a feel for who will be doing what and when. Also, you should know that training is a business responsibility—not just the charge of the person who is told to “show ‘X’ around for a while.” Unfortunately, that is a plan that will probably result in doing the exact same thing in six to eight weeks—as soon as “X” leaves and “Y” is hired.

#### 2. Understand the difference between Training and Orientation

Just as it’s important for training to nip technical mistakes in the bud, it’s equally important for an orientation process to stop business misconceptions in their tracks. First and foremost, the orientation process should help new employees get their feet under them. Introductions are important. Tours of facilities are key. Those two things don’t always happen, but they are usually on every manager’s “To Do” list, whether they get around to it or not. Other important things, however, frequently slip through the cracks.

No one likes to play in a game where it feels like the other players are making up the rules as they go along. For many employees, that’s exactly the kind of situation in which they work. The orientation process should review terms of the employment (compensation package elements, details of probationary period, discipline and termination procedures, safety goals and expectations, etc.) While it’s important to keep this process simple and non-confrontational, it’s equally important that the new employees not go into the relationship with any misconceptions.

Notice those things have very little to do with the job itself. That's why it's important to remember that while training and orientation are frequently lumped together, they are, in fact, two separate things. When thinking about the differences between training and orientation, the following chart may be useful.

Training	Orientation
Teaches job requirements and skills Conveys protocols and procedures Covers safety guidelines and expectations	Establishes social order Lays out business policies Sets the tone for the business relationship

Below is a checklist you might use when evaluating your orientation process.

- Did we put the new employee at ease?
- Have we included owners or top managers when possible?
- Did we encourage questions?
- Has first day paperwork been kept to a minimum?
- Did we provide a farm map and/or glossary of farm terms?
- Did we arrange a “social secretary” to help the new employee orient into the community?
- Did the manager make an effort to get the new employee to commit to spending at least one week on the job before they judge the position or business?

### 3. Have and monitor specific learning objectives for the training process

How will you know if your training process is succeeding or if you need to take the new employee aside and begin again with a different approach? Establishing the training objectives will help you to gauge their progress. Of course, these objectives should be tied directly to their job descriptions and the performance goals that are outlined there. These “baby steps” will help everyone to feel like the new employee is making progress when advancing and will help identify points of concern if the employee does not meet the objectives at the desired pace.

### 4. Allow plenty of time

Some new employees have no experience in the industry. You may expect to hold that person's hand and give him/her some guidance for the first few days. The trouble is that a few days is not enough time. I propose that it takes a minimum of thirty days for a new employee to be fully

oriented into a business. It takes 365 days for an employee to see one full year of an operation and can know what happens throughout the year for any given business.

Even employees who are experienced in the industry but are new to your business will need training and orientation. Just because a person has worked in a similar operation does not mean that there will not be things that he or she will have to learn about your site specifically. Every business speaks its own, individual, language. Be patient and thorough with people who are trying to learn to speak yours.

#### 5. Include frequent formal evaluation

For new employees, I advise a manager or supervisor to plan on following a strict schedule of formal evaluations for the first several months of the relationship. These sit-downs don't need to be strenuous or worrisome. Rather, many managers see them as a chance to touch base. By establishing evaluation as a healthy, beneficial process early in the relationship, evaluation becomes a part of the culture, a standard practice for that employee. You have already significantly increased the potential for that employee to be successful.

While you're evaluating that employee, ask, "is there anything that doesn't make sense to you...anything you think we could do differently?" This is an important question because we all are at risk of falling into ruts. New employees have one big advantage over you in that respect—they have "fresh eyes". Take advantage of this. Assure them that you genuinely want to hear their suggestions. Then, you can either explain something that had previously confused the trainee or you can reevaluate the business practice and possibly make an improvement thanks to that person's fresh perspective.

#### 6. Cross train when possible

One of the important things to remember when training a new employee is that it isn't only important for an employee to understand his/her job, but also the jobs of the other employees as well. Cross training is important for a number of very practical reasons.

First, let's consider an operation with three different departments performing three sets of separate, yet interrelated tasks (example, a hog operation with gestation, breeding, and farrowing teams.) Certainly if sows aren't bred, then they will never farrow so, therefore, breeding is very important to farrowing. But a new employee working in the farrowing units might not understand why they should perform tasks in their barn that will not reap benefits until the sows reach the breeding barn (that's the breeding team's problem!). Wrong. Cross training might help some of these expectations to make sense.

The second reason cross training is important is that all businesses will be short-staffed from time to time. Better to teach employees the basics for a variety of tasks before they are forced to step into those roles in an emergency situation.

#### 7. Don't forget safety

This is incredibly important not only from a human resource management standpoint but also from a legal perspective. Agriculture is the second deadliest industry in the country. If you think there are not safety issues in your operation, look around. Ask yourself how easy it might be for someone to get hurt. By outlining how important safety is to your business and then highlighting the dangers of your operation, you make a statement that you value safety and are committed to maintaining a safe work environment.

The following is a checklist you might want to use to evaluate your current training process.

- Did we give the new hire a clear understanding of what his/her job is?
- Did we convey what it takes to be successful in that job?
- Do these people now have the tools they need to do the job?
- Will they receive adequate time to master the tools?
- Do we make an effort to give people an appreciation of all of the roles in the business and how they connect through cross-training or other means?

Have we placed enough emphasis on safety?

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