

# ***Thoughts on Training***

## **Changing Market Place**

In today's snow and ice control business it is not uncommon to have a customer with the desire for an ice-free surface coupled with environmental concerns regarding the use of deicers. Meeting these challenges while working towards customer satisfaction, staying ahead of the competition, and still having an acceptable profit margin can be tricky. Training geared towards your specific needs and challenges can be very beneficial in meeting those challenges, and a good investment. On the other hand, sticking with old habits based on the attitude of "that is how we have always done it", and not receiving training in working with advance tools and/or work methods can in time be fatal to a business during times of changes in the industry. Using good training presenting well thought out subject matter followed up by a planned company implementation process can advance work methods and skills and provide the necessary skills to be competitive in the marketplace.

Nevertheless, employee training must be approached with obvious top down support, meaning more than just paying for it. The management message regarding training should be one stating that we are going to make the necessary changes to implement the benefits learned in the training, and nothing short of managed implementation of those items identified will be acceptable. Very often, things do not change after receiving quality training due to lack of implementation efforts and encouragement on the part of management.

## **Needs**

The need for training and/or retraining is often present and not even realized due to employee turnover. It is commonly assumed that even though a

couple of employees have left, those senior employees remaining will train the new employees brought on. The challenge here is that this unofficial OJT (on the job training) approach is typically unplanned, unstructured, and does nothing to verify what was taught or what was learned if it was covered. OJT, if structured and done properly is very beneficial, is an outstanding supplement to classroom training, and is an excellent way to help the new employee gain experience under guidance. However, OJT must be planned and approached with organized and incremental goals in mind. Incremental documentation must be provided by the OJT instructor showing that those goals were achieved.

This missed need for training due to employee turnover is often reinforced by asking, usually out of habit, senior workers about their thoughts on the need for training in a specific subject matter rather than asking a newer employee. When this happens, the odds are high that the senior employee will state they know about this or that training on the subject matter had been provided previously, not thinking about turn over, or trusting typically unplanned OJT to cover training needs. However, the answer is very often different when asked of a less senior staff. Talking to less senior employees cannot only identify training needs but can also verify the quality or lack of for the OJT assumed to be covering the training needs required to make up for the skills lost due to employee turnover.

## **Planning**

Training, like purchasing equipment or making other investments must be planned to maximize success. Planning steps must not only involve defining the desired training and then providing it, but they must also include plans for implementation of what was learned after the training is completed. Planning will ensure the right subject matter is identified and the best trainer is provided to teach employees. This planning process should include employee input. This team effort will not only ultimately provide the desired training on identified subjects but will also provide a valuable heads-up on who is to

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attend, why, and what they are to expect not only during the training, but after it is over in the form of implementation to reach established goals. Key planning considerations include:

### Subject Matter Selection

Identify your subject matter training needs in detail. Talking to key employees and obtaining their thoughts on training needs and why they feel it is needed is always beneficial. Include this input with management thoughts on training needs to develop the training goals to be reached and/or questions to be answered during the training session(s).

Actively seek the trainer you feel is best qualified to meet your training needs not only in terms of subject matter, but also one who can teach the subject matter in a method or combination of methods required to best present it. While discussing your specific needs with the potential trainer be sure to co-author and agree upon a list of the training goals to be accomplished and questions to be addressed.

### Delivery

Consideration should be given to the type of training sought and how it is to be delivered. With today's technologies, there are many different types of training available. No one method is best, and it is important to decide what is best for your specific subject matter, business, and needs. An obvious example is equipment operations training. Training of this type not only requires classroom time to cover theory of operations including the how's and whys, but also hands on time to get familiar with the machine and to gain basic skills. The goal here is to get them familiar enough to let them gain experience on their own. Often through OJT guidance. This type of training requires an instructor with both classroom presentation and hands-on skills.

### Financial/Expenses

Training is too often looked at as an expense rather than an investment. An investment that when made and followed up on with an implementation plan almost always provides a good return on investment (ROI). Regardless of how good the training and/or trainer is, training is mostly useless without implementing what was learned. With regular training in place and with implementation as appropriate being the standard practice, a business will nearly always see a return on their investment. A study by David Essex finds that employee training increases a company's ROI (return on investment).

### Summary

There are many benefits to quality well planned training including smoother operations, ROI, employee satisfaction, employee flexibility with cross training, and an environment of overall knowledge transfer. Recently while conducting training the subject of employee attitude came up during a training session. One of the attendees asked me "Why did a previous company pay for training and then always let one person ruin it with their attitude and actions?" The answer according to those in attendance was that even though this person was stuck in their ways, had a bad attitude, and did not want to change anything ever, they were allowed because they worked hard and had been around for a long time. After some discussions, it became clear that this individual was sent to this training class in hopes that perhaps training would address the issues that employee evaluation, counseling and perhaps disciplinary action had not. To be clear, this is not the responsibility of nor the purpose of training.

Training when approached correctly is an investment into your company's future. Every effort should be made by those seeking the training to assure it is well planned, well presented and that everyone there is attending because they desire to learn. It is also good to remember that change often comes hard, and it is very easy to fall back into old habits.