

Continuous Training

Providing educational experiences as part of the workplace is important for the continued growth of your employees. This gives them the opportunity to learn valuable skills and techniques, increase their knowledge about the industry, and learn new behaviors.

There is no "silver bullet" or one way to educate your employees. People learn in many different ways - some are visual learners, others prefer reading or attending a local discussion group.

Consider where and how your employees will learn new information

- On-farm informational sessions (formal and informal)
- Outside trainers on farm
- "Teachable moments"
- With a coach or mentor
- Discussion/exchange groups
- Visiting other farms, agricultural businesses and industry
- Videos, CD's, internet, books, magazines and publications
- Attending a workshop, seminar, conference
- Home study or continuing education courses

To make training a satisfactory experience for both the employer and employee, particularly if you are coordinating or teaching, consider the following points:

- Provide opportunities for training that is applicable to the skills the employee needs, or pertinent information which will broaden his understanding of the workplace.
- Plan for specific results.
- Build on the strengths of the employee.
- When providing training, give it in "chunks" so that it is easier to absorb.
- Provide time for discussion.

The training process consists of

- Explaining and demonstrating correct task performance
- Helping workers to perform under supervision
- Allowing personnel to perform alone
- Evaluating worker performance
- Coaching employees based on evaluation results. These steps may have to be repeated a number of times before an employee will sufficiently grasp what needs to be done.
- Once an employee has mastered the required performance, he can further cement his skill by coaching another.

There is an important difference between telling workers how to do a task and successfully transferring skills, ability or knowledge. Ineffective training may lead employees to remove much of the fruiting wood in pruning or to destroy a dozen rows of young tomato plants with a cultivator. Some concepts are difficult to learn; others require much practice.

When Training Personnel You Should

- Continually assess workers' level of understanding
- Gear training to the participants
- Present only a few concepts at a time
- Where needed, divide tasks into simplified components
- Involve all workers (do not assume other employees will catch on by watching one worker being trained)
- Use visual aids (e.g., samples of defective fruit)
- Encourage questions.

As in any teaching situation, workers will feel more comfortable if the supervisor or trainer is friendly and patient. Honest praise also helps.

Employee participation in learning

While explanations and demonstrations are important in training, workers are more likely to retain information when they can put it to use. Unfortunately, this vital step is often eliminated because it requires time. It takes patience to watch a worker struggle with a task that comes easily to the trainer. Especially at the lower end of skills acquisition, teaching methods are more effective when they emphasize practice over theory.

Explanations should be limited in length and complexity. When showing a video (e.g., pesticide safety) you will want to encourage employees to ask questions ... and be ready to ask questions of them, too. This way you can check for worker comprehension. As participants improve in their skill level, the introduction of theory becomes more vital.

Besides cementing the employee's own skills, having employees help each other can reduce total training time and free supervisors to do other work. Many employees appreciate and enjoy the added responsibility and status of helping with coworker training. A caution is in order here, that employees who act as trainers should be sufficiently advanced that indeed they will be positive role models.

Adapted by UVM Extension from an excerpt from:

Labor Management in Ag: Cultivating Personnel Productivity, Chapter Five

[\[http://www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7labor/001.htm\]](http://www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7labor/001.htm)

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