Employee Training: A Guide For Employers

Properly trained employees are an employer's most valuable asset in today's complex work environment. Employee training can help reduce rising incident rates and the cost of workers' compensation and liability insurance. It is often inadequate or nonexistent safety and incident prevention training that results in incident related injuries. For example, employees who must bend and lift, or who do frequent repetitive motions, must be trained to bend, lift and move in a safe manner. Good techniques will go a long way in preventing a variety of costly muscle and tendon related injuries.

EFFECTIVE TRAINING METHODS

Individuals who conduct safety training must understand the adult learning process. The information should be presented clearly and must relate directly to the worker's job. Trainees must be made aware of the importance of the new knowledge and skills which contribute to the safety and efficiency of their day-to-day tasks. This can be done by proper preparation, presentation, participation and follow-up.

PREPARATION

The stage should be set by the trainer so that the training matches the goals intended. Proper training materials, audio visuals, a designated training area, demonstration materials, etc. are all things to consider in preparation. Make sure everything is in order for a smooth training session that truly motivates workers. A disorganized trainer is not effective and wastes a lot of peoples' time. Remember, you can never be too prepared; do your homework before you train.

PRESENTATION

Effective presentation is the key to good training. Remember that everyone learns at their own pace. Be sure to take the time for those who learn more slowly. Also, present the *basics* first, then the *nice to know* information if appropriate. Minimize irrelevant information.

Relate training to past experiences. This will allow workers to understand the information from a human perspective and retain it. Good storytelling works if it relates to the training. Lastly, ensure that you present the information clearly and concisely.

PARTICPATION

Workers should have the opportunity to apply their new information and skills in a practice situation. For example, they are more likely to learn the details of how to wear safety gear by practicing with the equipment in a group situation, than if they memorize a set of printed instructions.

Employee learning is more comprehensive when the trainees are provided with the opportunity to plan or try out what they have learned before applying it to their jobs. When they put together all the elements of the training in a rehearsal situation, they are more comfortable with their new skills, and more likely to use them with confidence.

Stephen R. Covey said, "To change behavior, reverse the role." When feasible, allow competent employees to conduct some of the training.

FOLLOW UP

After the training is completed, quizzes and skills tests provide good indicators of trainee learning retention. This also gives them a chance to practice their recall of the training and for the instructor to evaluate the trainees who may need additional training.

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Follow-up with workers should be done within short time after training by the supervisor or trainer. This ensures the skills are retained over the long term. Employees also need to be trained on a regular basis, not just when they are new to a job. Annual refresher training is needed as the work environment and regulatory requirements change.

SUMMARY

Your employees are your most valuable asset. An investment in time spent to train them properly in safety and all other areas will pay dividends to your company.

For further information and assistance in employee training, you can contact your local OSHA consultation office, your equipment and materials suppliers, private consultants specializing in safety and health, and the Safety & Health Department at Zenith.

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