

# Designing and Implementing Effective Training Programs for Hispanic Workers

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## Introduction

Regardless of the size of your farm or business, training plays an important role in its success. People in the field of education say that “education is power” and training is educating your workers. There are no training materials that work in all possible scenarios. Therefore, training materials have to take into account the social, cultural, and environmental factors of the target audience and the unique characteristics of the workplace. Sometimes educational materials do not work because they are designed without examining the worksite or considering the social and environmental factors affecting your employees. Training efforts and techniques that have worked well in the past with your “local” workers might not work with your new Hispanic workforce.

There are several challenges that you must address in order for your training program to be successful. Your Hispanic workers come from a different culture and speak a different language. Therefore, implementing a training program may require more effort and might be a little more expensive. But if it is well done, it will pay off in the long run. While language and cultural differences are the two biggest barriers to overcome while training Hispanic workers, there are some others that you also have to think about and definitely take into account while developing and implementing a training program. Such things include the worksite environment, your workers’ level of education or literacy level, and their exposure to certain skills and technology that you have in your farm or business. All these things play an important role if you are to succeed in your training efforts.

For example, some of your Hispanic workers may not have ever been exposed to certain types of machinery, technology or equipment that it is very familiar to you and has been part of operation for years. You may have to begin teaching them some of the most basic skills so they can perform the tasks that involve the use of this equipment. This example really illustrates the importance of taking the time to develop and implement an effective training program for your Hispanic workforce.

There are several key steps that will help you to develop and hold effective training sessions with your Hispanic workers. You will have to stop and take some time to plan. Remember that good planning is required in order to be successful. Also, remember to write down all of your training ideas, no matter how minor or simple they seem to you. You will likely find them helpful while designing your training program and actually educating your workers. This paper will lead you through several key steps that can make your training with Hispanic workers more effective.

## Understanding what your employees need

### *The worksite environment and appropriate conditions*

Before doing any kind of training, you should first create the appropriate working environment and conditions for your workers. You need to provide the appropriate equipment and supplies that your employees need in order to complete the requested tasks. Regardless of how well your training program was conducted, the working environment and the conditions of your worksite must be situated so that it supports their willingness and ability to follow through and

implement the newly learned practices. Let us consider a couple examples:

Suppose that you have a company that handles food and you will train your workers on hand washing. You have conducted an excellent training, your workers understand the importance of hand washing and they intend to follow through with your recommendations and actually wash their hands as you instructed. Despite the behavioral intent of your workers, hand washing will never occur if there are not adequate bathrooms or hand washing facilities available to your workers. Soap and paper towels are also necessary to create the appropriate conditions for accomplishing hand washing. You must provide adequate equipment and supplies for your employees.

Now, let us suppose that you see the benefit of requiring your employees to wear latex gloves while they are milking cows, but you are concerned about the added cost. Therefore, you decide to provide each of your employees with only one box of gloves per month because you have calculated, albeit incorrectly, that one box is sufficient. If they use the entire box before the end of the month, you explain that you will charge them for the extra gloves. You believe this will encourage the workers to be judicious with the use of gloves and not waste them. Correct glove usage will not be successful because there are not good working environment conditions.

Think about your operation and remember you have to provide your workers with all the tools and supplies they need in order to complete their tasks. This is one of your important roles as an owner or supervisor.

### **The Needs Assessment**

A need is the gap between what is and what ought to be. A needs assessment is a systematic approach to establish your needs. A needs assessment in your business will help you to identify the training program goals and objectives, as well as the things that should be done in order to accomplish these goals and objectives. Developing a needs assessment is not as complicated as one may think. The owners

and managers need to know and understand specifically what needs to be accomplished. Furthermore, they need to know who is responsible for completing each of the tasks. Then, they must understand what everyone needs to know in order to successfully complete these tasks. Finally, they need to compare what the employees currently know and understand to what they need to know and understand. The needs assessment is developed directly from this process, with the help of your workers and perhaps an outside trainer or consultant. They will likely be an excellent resource for identifying the training needs in your company.

Sometimes managers and owners may think that they know every single detail of their operation, regardless of its size. But surprisingly, there are often specific issues and patterns that can be overlooked by the company's managers or owners. Therefore, it is necessary to think very carefully about each of the routines, tasks, and processes that your employees need to understand. You must first clearly understand the entire job of all your workers. You have to ask yourself if your workers are performing your jobs effectively and if they know how to get the job properly done. Then, you need to write down all of your training needs and prioritize them based on importance. Having an outsider come in to your operation with fresh eyes may also help you to discover all of the issues that impact the success of your training and help you to better understand all of the things you need.

Methods for conducting your needs assessment include but are not limited to: direct observations, a short survey, interviewing your personnel in key positions, your operation's records and logs, and literature review. A combination of a couple of methods is recommended. The data you obtain will help you to prioritize and also to identify the costs of your training.

After developing your prioritized list of training needs, you can use the list to develop your training program. For example, you can use this information to develop a checklist of the things you consider absolutely necessary for your workers to know and understand. Then, you can

begin with the most important training needs for the initial training you conduct with new employees.

Things that might be familiar, logical and easy to do for you may be very difficult for someone who is not familiar with that task. So don't take things for granted when you are looking at what you need in your training program. Such simple things as wearing a hairnet can be complicated. For example, during a food safety training session, an employee said that every single supervisor kept telling her to properly wear her hairnet. The problem was that no one had ever told her the right way to do it. The point here is that she was willing to wear the hairnet, but did not know how to put it on correctly. Even though this is a very simple task, she just did not understand the process!

Overall goals and objectives of the organizations should also be identified. This often serves as the guiding principle for everyone working in the organization. Everyone needs to understand these goals and objectives. They also need to know what their role is in meeting the goals and how the guiding principle will help them to make decisions. The needs assessment will further help to develop the training needs so that the employees understand how they fit into the broader organization and how they are contributing to the overall goals and objectives.

### **The Importance of a Learning Objective**

Once a needs assessment is completed and we have created a scenario that will enable the employees to successfully complete the tasks because we are providing the tools and supplies necessary, it is time to move on to planning the actual training event. Remember that proper planning avoids poor performance by the trainer during the training and by your workers following the training program. It is very important that you stop for a moment and spend some time developing specific learning objectives.

A learning objective is the specific knowledge or skill that your workers will be able to perform or to demonstrate after the training has taken place.

The process of writing learning objectives can be time consuming and can be challenging. However, time invested in developing a solid learning objective is well worth it. You will create a clearer idea on specifically what you need to accomplish during the training sessions. Furthermore, when you have developed a series of learning objectives your training will become more standardized. This will lead to a more effective overall training program in the future for both your new and existing workers.

As you prepare to write learning objectives for your workers, you need to think about the knowledge and/or skills you want your workers to have after the training session. This information comes directly from the prioritized list of training needs developed as you assessed the needs of your workforce. Creating learning objectives directly from the prioritized list of training needs will lead to more effective learning objectives, more effective training and improved performance of your workers.

A good learning objective should be written with words describing observable and measurable behaviors. These should be behaviors or actions that you specifically expect your employees to exhibit or to be able to do following the training programs. Action verbs that describe the specific measurable behaviors or actions are preferred. Here are a few example action words that can be used to define specifically what the employees will be able to do following the training session: implement, perform, analyze, conduct, use, check, evaluate, inspect, solve, assist, select, manage, adjust, perform, examine, recommend, demonstrate, etc.

Learning objectives need to be learner centered, not instructor centered. As the owner or supervisor, you are defining what you would like your workers to do when the training sessions are completed... not what you will be doing. Effective learning objectives clearly explain the expectations for the employee. Specifically, what is the expected behavior and performance? To make sure that your learning objectives are learner centered, they should start with a statement like, "The employee will..." In other words, a good learning objective states

who does what, when and how. "Who" means your workers. "What" means the tasks they will be able to do or demonstrate. Finally, "when and how" defines when and how the employees will complete the specific tasks.

Here are a few example learning objectives:

1. All mushrooms pickers must wash their hands using the proper hand washing technique before they start working at the beginning of the day, after taking a break and after using the restroom.
2. All milkers will implement the specific parlor routine and follow the specific milking procedures during all milking shifts.
3. All employees working in our orchards will demonstrate safety procedures while harvesting fruit or operating equipment.
4. Crew foremen will design and explain the daily work plan for the landscaping crews.

### **The Training Day**

The literacy and education level of your Hispanic workforce is important to know while conducting a training program. Unfortunately, many of your Hispanic workers come from very economically depressed areas and have a very low educational level. Therefore, your training has to definitely take this into account, along with the language barrier and the cultural differences.

Adequate teaching materials are very important. For example, a sheet of paper with text containing Standard Operating Procedures will be difficult to understand to some of your workers and these materials will end up in the trashcan. The usage of visual aids, drawings and graphics to support your concepts will play a key role while training your Hispanic workers. Digital cameras can become a great resource to produce your own educational materials and posters that can be hung on the walls. You can pre-stage things that you would like your workers to learn and produce your own educational materials.

Hands-on training, demonstrations, and role-playing are recommended but if you have to teach some theoretical concepts introduce lots of activities and discussions to get your point across. Adult learners are practical and relevancy oriented, they want to learn things that they can apply to their work. They must see a reason for learning anything. This is another important reason for developing good learning objectives.

Create an active learning environment. Do not tell your workers anything if you can ask them about it. Open-ended questions are preferred over yes-no questions. This will get your workers talking and create a discussion about the topic in question. At the beginning, it might be tough to get your workers talking. However, as soon as they feel comfortable and motivated you won't stop them.

The training sessions have to be short and cover one or two things per session. Do not make the common mistake of trying to teach 10 different things in one session, this is a waste of time and money and even worse, you will probably have to retrain your workers. Be enthusiastic and patient. Your workers will be able to figure out when you are being sincere during the training sessions.

Another common mistake is to have big groups of people receiving the training. This is very impersonal and does not provide the adequate environment to generate discussion or ask questions to get workers' feedback. In general, people do not like or are afraid to ask questions. Your Hispanic workers are not an exception; they want to succeed at work and to please the manager. Questions might be considered as a way to show their weaknesses. Always form small groups. This might be time-consuming but it will pay off in the end.

There are many resources that can help you to conduct the training but not all of them may be appropriate to your operation and your workers. Consult with your extension office or with the industry consultants. They can become a helpful resource to conduct your initial training.

## **The Language Barrier**

There are several alternatives to minimize or even eliminate the language barrier between agricultural and horticultural managers and their employees. While each alternative offers some advantages, managers will find that the most effective way to minimize the language barrier is to implement a combination of the following approaches:

### **Owner/manager learns Spanish:**

Options include specialized industry-specific Spanish classes, community colleges, self-paced learning tools, immersion programs, practicing with Hispanic employees, reading industry-related materials in Spanish, etc.

**Employees learn English:** Options include hiring tutors for your workers, local English as a Second Language programs, other advocacy groups, practice with English-speaking owners and managers, etc.

**Hiring an interpreter:** This can be an effective option, but care must be taken to ensure that the interpreter is available when needed and is able to understand the industry-specific terminology.

A sincere commitment by the owner and manager to eliminate the language barrier is absolutely needed. They must put forth a lot of effort and initiate this learning process. A sincere commitment will provide the motivation to learn the Spanish, the encouragement of the Hispanic workers to learn English, lead to improved training programs, and lead to overall improved performance of the employees.

It is important to point out that translation does not mean culturally compatible educational materials. To overcome the language barrier try to use the clearest and most concise English during training, again go over one thing at a time and be specific on what you want and avoid jargon. Use pauses while you are talking and get help from visual aids. If possible, always carry a small dictionary in the car glove compartment. They cost you only few bucks but might save

you lots of time and maybe money. Be aware that some training materials can have an excellent level of Spanish but they may not be culturally compatible with your workers.

## **The Importance of Evaluating your Training Program**

No matter if you are trying to teach one skill or several skills to your workers you should evaluate your workers. By evaluating your workers you will be able to know if things were accomplished and if the workers really got what you wanted them to learn. You will also be able to improve your training sessions for future use. The best way to do this is by evaluating the skill you have taught during the training session. For example, if you are teaching your workers hand washing techniques you should make sure they have understood the procedure. Your workers do not like to ask questions or give feedback, but keep encouraging them to do so. You should not take things for granted, ask them to demonstrate to you that they have learned and understood what you wanted. Then if you see that things have not been properly retained you will have to repeat the information.

Follow-up is an important part of the training process. It is important to let your workers digest and apply at work the information they have received in the training session. Constantly follow up on the skill or practice that has been taught. At some point, the behavior you are looking for will become a habit. Provide reinforcement and give feedback to the workers. It is a good idea to recognize your workers when they are properly doing the tasks. You might have to re-train but once things are working you won't have to worry about that specific thing anymore. Remember that Hispanic workers are very dependable at work and want to do their tasks correctly.

## **The Importance of the Supervisors**

Some of the supervisors, especially those on farms or in businesses that recently began to employ Hispanic workers, have been selected to take over a supervisor's position based on their ability to communicate in Spanish, not based on their management skills or abilities. Typically,

he is the Hispanic employee who is best able to overcome the language barrier since they can speak some English.

Because of the language and cultural differences between the owners or managers and your Hispanic workers, there may be a large communication gap between them. One of the biggest challenges is that the owner or managers may not even be aware of this communication gap. It is the responsibility of the owners and managers to assure that this does not create problems or lead to the workers not being able to complete the tasks expected of them. They must work proactively to minimize this challenge! Here is an example from a visit to a mushroom packing plant that illustrates the problems that can arise from a gap in communication between Hispanic workers, their supervisor, and the owners.

I was in the lunch room with one of the owners of the mushroom growing and packing company. I went to wash my hands at their hand washing station and I noticed that the water coming out the sink was very cold. This is a barrier for hand washing. One of the workers also came to me and asked me to tell the owner that the water was cold. When I told this to this owner, we both were amazed that this water had been cold for a long time and agreed that if this worker or any of the 100 workers in that mushroom packing company had told his supervisor about this problem, the problem probably would have lasted no more than 20 minutes. It took no more than a minute to call the maintenance crew to make them aware of the problem. Then they came and fixed it right away.

The worker did not tell his supervisor about this problem because in order to succeed at work he thought that not bothering his supervisor was a good thing. He was probably afraid to say that something was wrong with the company's facilities. It is very difficult to get feedback from the Hispanic workers without open and honest communication. In order to break this communication gap with your workers it is important to bond with your workers. Ask them and encourage them to give you feedback.

Another challenge is the difference in "power distance" between the American and the Hispanic culture. This makes some of the supervisors get on unnecessary power trips and treat their peer workers unfairly or impolitely. Therefore, it is imperative that owners better understand the necessary supervisory skills and provide training to themselves and their managers. They must proactively work to correct these issues and realize that a supervisory position is an opportunity to provide leadership and to assist all employees who are working with them.

As you can see, training for owners and managers will have to go beyond the technical skills required in the workplace. Professional development of owners and managers must include management skills, decision-making, understanding of the company's policies and rules, and leadership.

The most important thing is to make sure everyone understands what role the supervisor plays. They are directly involved in management and decision-making, and the leadership they provide employees is critical to their own success as supervisors and the success of the organization. Supervisors are critical to all training programs, as they are leaders and role models to the other employees.

### **The Importance of Motivating Your Workers**

After the training has been completed, owners and managers need to follow-up with their workers. They need to evaluate performance in a non-confrontational manner and be available to coach the workers as they continue to perform the specific tasks that are part of their job descriptions. The owners and managers need to reinforce the concepts they were taught in the training sessions. As the workers demonstrate that they have learned the skills and are implementing them consistently, the owners and managers need to positively reinforce this performance. Whenever something goes wrong, be careful of the way you deal with the issue. It is part of the Hispanic culture to not separate work from emotions. No one likes to be embarrassed in front of his or her co-workers.

Developing positive and constructive personal and working relationships with employees is critical to successfully motivating them to respond positively to training. Developing a team atmosphere in your organization will help to remind everyone of the interdependency they each have on one another. Working together, they will realize that their own personal success and the success of the organization are dependent on how well they work together.

Here is a list of ideas that, if implemented, can lead to positive relationships and improved teamwork in your organization:

- Learn and understand about the difference in cultural backgrounds
- Greet the Hispanic workers with, “Buenos días.” “Buenas tardes.” or “Buenas noches.”
- Constantly provide positive reinforcement by telling the worker when they are doing a great job. It is very important to tell them that you like the way they are doing things at work.
- Create an open and receptive environment for workers to provide ideas and suggestions to improve the working environment, practices or procedures.
- Owners and managers, have lunch with your Hispanic workers.
- Develop a positive incentive plan
- Provide unique and unexpected rewards for good performance. For example, phone cards, tickets to sporting events, clothing with the organizations name, etc.

### **Summary**

Training is a very important part of your business. It is an investment in the future success of your business. As you begin to make improvements in your training program, you first need to ensure you have an appropriate worksite environment with conditions that enable your employees to successfully complete all of their tasks correctly. Secondly, you need to identify your training needs by completing a

needs assessment of your organization and employees. After you have identified your needs, you then need to develop specific learning objectives that will lead to a greater level of success with your training program.

Next comes the actual training events. It is very important for you to remember to teach only in small groups with hands-on training, demonstrations and customized training materials. In addition, you need to remember to adjust for literacy levels, language barriers and cultural differences of your Hispanic workforce.

Following the training programs, you will need to evaluate how well the programs worked by assessing improvements in the skill levels of your employees. In addition, you and your managers need to provide positive feedback, coaching and retraining when necessary. Finally, you need to remember that the managers and supervisors are a critical link to a successful training program. They must have the appropriate skills to work with and motivate your employees. Implementing these key steps or processes in your farm or business will lead to improved training programs and improve the performance of your employees.