

Orienting and Training from the Ground Up

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Learning Objectives: Participants will...

1. Identify knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are important in the jobs for which they train.
 2. Write a specific, measurable learning objective.
 3. Be able to explain why training is an essential part of performance management.
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High performing people have it all together: knowledge, skills, and attitude. For example, a top herdsman has the skills he or she needs to get the job done, the knowledge to recognize when something is going wrong, and the attitude required to produce quality even in difficult times. Of course, all that knowledge and skill, combined with the right attitude, didn't happen overnight. Someone took time to develop the top herdsman or he learned over time through hard earned experience.

High performing employees can be built from the ground up. If a person comes to work with the desire to learn and succeed then he or she can become a high performer, regardless of past experiences. A well-designed training program is the blueprint and a dedicated supervisor is the builder, together they can turn quality raw material into a high performing employee.

PHASE ONE: Preparation

Needs Analysis: What makes a high performer?

The first step in building a high performing employee is to identify exactly what knowledge, skills, and attitudes are needed to successfully perform the job. There are in-depth, research-based methods to do this called competency analysis. An example of research-based competency charts for dairy managers can be found at: <http://dairyalliance.psu.edu/hr/personnel/>. You can adapt these charts for jobs in your operation and ask current employees for additions and changes that help customize the chart for your situation.

The next step is to distinguish a high performer from an average performer. These differences might be in the knowledge or skill that a more educated or experienced person has, or they might

be attitudinal in nature. If you can identify what makes a high performer then you should be able to target your training toward building more of them.

Learning Objectives

Training is much more effective when the learning outcomes are defined in advance. Learning objectives simply state what the learner should know, believe, or be able to do at the end of the training. Again, what knowledge, skills, and attitudes does a person need to succeed?

For example: a good herdsman needs to be able to identify a problem animal early, before it is really sick. In dairy we call this “cow sense.” Good cow sense involves knowledge of which groups of animals are likely to have which problems or diseases, it involves an acquired skill in observing groups of normal animals and finding the one that is abnormal, and it involves an attitude or belief that finding problem animals quickly is possible and important.

A cow sense training program for a herdsman could include the following learning objectives:

After cow sense training, the new herdsman will:

1. Identify each cow group and name two common problems that could be found in each group.
2. Visually identify abnormal animals using a mental checklist.
3. Explain how quickly identifying problem cows helps the animal and makes our business more competitive.

Clear learning objectives help the trainer and the learner to work together toward accomplishing the learning objectives.

Instructional Design

Effective training requires tasks to be broken down into steps, concepts to be illustrated, and relationships to be defined. Learners need to know *what* to do at a minimum, but they often need to know *why* as well.

To train someone how to do a work procedure, you must analyze the procedure and break it down into its component steps. This analysis process is the same as you would use to develop a standard operating procedure (SOP). SOPs are written, step-by-step instructions for completing a task and they-go-hand in hand with training. (Read more about SOPs at <http://dairyalliance.psu.edu/hr/performance/sop/>).

Other training might be more conceptual in nature and less task-oriented. In those cases it might be necessary to have illustrations or examples prepared to help learners gain knowledge or

change attitude. Let us revisit our example of training a herdsman to quickly identify problem cows.

A map of various cattle pens could be very useful in helping the new employee learn where certain groups are located. Notes about potential problems he may encounter in those groups could also help increase his knowledge. Finally, some information about the economic costs of diseases and the value of rapid detection might help instill an aggressive attitude toward problem identification in the new herdsman.

PHASE TWO: Training

Orientation

First impressions are important. Orientation is a onetime chance to make a welcoming first impression with a new employee and to establish priorities and patterns that will last throughout the relationship. It is a great opportunity to make the employee feel welcomed and to help the employee get up to speed about all things great and small, everything from bathroom location to the mission of the business.

In most cases the employee's new direct supervisor should conduct orientation, but others should be involved too. Owners or senior managers should show up at some point to demonstrate that the new person is important and that the owner cares. In fact, if they feel this way, owners should say these very words, "I care about my employees and I want to see you succeed in your new job." Other employees should be alerted that a new employee orientation is taking place, introduced whenever possible, and even involved in the orientation. Other employees play a big role in creating a welcoming environment.

Here is a list of topics to consider including in orientation:

- The history, mission, goals, and values of the business
- Basic workplace topics such as: parking, break rooms, bathrooms, uniforms, where lunch can be stored, etc.
- Policies and practices such as: pay schedules, smoking, sick days
- Overview of benefits, such as: vacation, health insurance
- Safety review, including how to call for help in an emergency
- Rules, especially zero tolerance rules on: drinking, fighting, theft, safety, animal welfare
- Overview of the farm organization chart and relationships
- A tour of the farm demonstrating how the entire system works together and connecting other employees with their jobs

This list can be overwhelming. If it is too much for the first day then some parts should be moved to a later date. Many of these issues should be covered in an employee handbook as well. Make sure that the first impression created by orientation isn't just a bunch of paper pushing and form signing. Topics such as benefits could be moved to the end of the first week as long as no enrollment periods are missed. Extremely important topics such as safety could be pulled out of orientation and delivered as a stand-alone training topic. In that case, safety should still be mentioned and briefly summarized on day one, but the employee should be informed that more thorough safety training will follow soon.

New employees will quickly pick up on what really matters in your workplace. A mission statement that is introduced in orientation, known by current employees, and revisited in training will stand out as important to the new employee. In contrast, safety policies that are skimmed over and not revisited will give the impression that safety is not a priority. Your orientation program should establish your business priorities and set the stage for your new employee to continue learning and developing into a high performer.

Procedure Training to Build Skills and Attitudes

After you hire a good person and give that person an orientation to their new workplace, it is time to focus on initial task training. Procedure training might take place on the first day after orientation or it might have to wait until the first full workday. Most agricultural jobs consist largely of procedures that must be repeatedly carried out to generate production. The cows and pigs have to be fed, barns have to be cleaned, shots administered, and ear tags applied. Procedure training is mainly about teaching the skills it takes to successfully perform the job. In other words, the emphasis is on teaching *what* to do rather than on *why* we do it.

In most cases the person who will supervise should also train. The trainer should set aside plenty of time without interruption for training. It is also important for the trainer to show patience, adjust to the learner's pace, and show an eagerness to answer questions.

It is helpful for trainers to keep in mind a pattern that they can use to keep on track. Tell, show, do, review is a helpful procedure training pattern that also works to accommodate people with different learning styles.

TELL the learner about the procedure and how each step fits together with the others. Also point out steps that are particularly important.

SHOW the learner how to do the task by physically demonstrating while the learner watches.

DO. Give the learner a chance to do the procedure. Some people really have to get their hands into a task before then can truly comprehend it.

REVIEW. After the learner has practiced the procedure give feedback on how he did. It is important to give lots of praise to a learner. Praise him for steps that he did correctly and tell him again how to do the steps that he got wrong.

Give learners as many opportunities to practice skills as possible and as much opportunity to ask questions as possible.

Continued Training to Build Knowledge and Attitudes

The emphasis in initial procedural training is on what to do. As the learner practices on the job and masters the basic skills, the emphasis of training should shift to *why* we do it. Understanding why work is performed in certain ways is critical to maintain positive attitudes about work over the long term. A beginner can be motivated to perform in a certain way simply because he or she was trained that way, but with time and experience it becomes tempting to cut corners a little to make the work faster or easier. However, people who understand the importance of doing a job in the right way are much more likely to sustain good attitudes over the long term. Consider sanitation practices when feeding youngstock for example. Those who do not know how rapidly disease can spread and kill may be tempted to cut corners on sanitation, while those who have been well-trained on *why* sanitation is important will keep up with good hygiene practices.

Continued training can be done in formal or informal ways. Some supervisors have success by using a coaching approach at teachable moments. A teachable moment is a time when circumstances make someone open to learning, such as when a problem occurs, or an example presents itself naturally. Good coaches take advantage of teachable moments to drive home key points about *why* work should be done properly. An employee disappointed by the death of a calf might be a teachable moment about sanitation, a sow having trouble delivering pigs might present a teachable moment for the new herdsman. The coach's job in these moments is to link procedures that the learner should follow (or decisions that she might make in these situations) to the eventual outcomes that can result. Thus the trainer can help the learner make the connection between procedures and *why* they are important.

More formal training programs can also be used to build knowledge and proper attitudes. Supervisors can pull individuals or the crew together to review procedures and why they are important. These sessions can be as short as 15 minutes and still be effective. Some supervisors take advantage of the technical professionals that they work with (veterinarians, nutritionists, pharmaceutical representatives, Extension) to provide continuing training for employees.

Continuing training is a powerful tool to keep employees motivated and performing at a high level. It reminds people that the work they are doing is truly important and keeps building their interest and knowledge of the job.

PHASE THREE: Evaluation and Improvement

Evaluation is almost always overlooked in agricultural training programs. Evaluation is simply a means to answer the question, “Did this training accomplish the objectives or not?” Use the learning objectives that you developed when preparing the training. Follow up with the learner after about a week has passed since the training. In many cases you can assess the learner’s knowledge with a quick verbal quiz. Put the learner at ease by pointing out that you are checking the training effectiveness. Remember the “cow sense” learning objectives, questions like the following can tell you how effective the training was:

Harold (shift supervisor): “Hi Joe, how’s it going? It looks like you are picking up quickly on your work. I want to check on how effective your training last week was. Can you tell me which cow groups are in the south barn?”

Joe (new herdsman): “You bet, I’ve got it down now. The first couple days I had to look at that map you gave me but now I know it’s the low group and close-up cows in the south barn. I check the close-up cows for signs of calving every hour.”

Harold: “OK great, we also talked about the importance of finding sick cows fast, do you remember why that’s important?”

Joe: “Catch ‘em quick, less time sick. That saves us money and headaches fooling with sick cows.”

Harold: “Joe, you’ve been working a week now. What did we miss in your procedure training, there must be something?”

Joe: “There was a lot to learn between orientation and getting started that first day, my head was swimming. But I should’ve learned more about what to do when I find a sick cow. I learned to write her number down but I didn’t know that I could bring her up to the hospital pen. Manuel wondered why I didn’t go ahead and do that.”

Harold: “OK, that’s a good point, I’ll add that to the training plan for next time. Remember that this Wednesday we’re going to spend an hour learning about metabolic diseases and what to watch for in our cow groups. Do you have any questions for me now?”

Evaluating training is a perfect opportunity to follow up and reinforce concepts. It is also a chance to gain valuable information to use in improving your training program.

Conclusion

Training is so fundamental to employee management that it is often taken for granted. A good training program helps prevent misunderstandings and performance problems. You can build a

training program in your operation that will produce more high performers. You need to identify the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that it takes to be a high performer, build training experiences to teach them, and follow up with employees to reinforce what they learned.

Start with a good foundation (Can this section appear as a sidebar?)

If you're going to build a high-performer, you've got to start with a good foundation. When you recruit candidates and make your selection try to measure the underlying employability skills that lead to success in the workplace. Employability skills include:

- Effective interpersonal skills
- Self-management strategies such as timeliness and ability to work at a reasonable pace
- The ability to work in teams
- Problem solving skills
- Decision making skills

You can assess employability skills by asking the candidate to give examples of using them in past experiences, checking references, and checking with previous employers. If all these employability skills are in place then your new employee is less likely to have major problems fitting in with others, and is more likely to be trainable. Technical knowledge and skill is usually less important than these employability skills because they can be more easily taught.

Options for Training Delivery (Another Sidebar if possible)

On-The-Job (OTJ) training is very common and necessary for many situations. Procedure training is almost always done OTJ because it has to be customized to the operation. It's best if supervisors do OTJ training because they will also be evaluating and following up with the employees.

Job aids can be very powerful tools to support training or partially replace it. SOPs are the most common job aid but there are also checklists, maps, diagrams, signs, and any other handy piece of information that can help someone do their job.

Online training. Big companies develop web-based training programs for their workforce. Organizations such as the National Pork Board offer online training for producers and their employees. Extension has some online training. As technology advances it will soon be quite easy for individual farms to put training programs online for their employees to use.

Extension has long been a source of technical training for producers. In some areas Extension resources can be tapped to provide custom training for individual or small groups of farms.

Suppliers are another resource for training. Agricultural companies often have highly educated and experienced representatives and technical support people who will provide training, especially for their large accounts. These resources should be accessed for continuing training purposes because they often have visual aids such as Powerpoint presentations and diagrams that can help explain why procedures are important.

Videos have long been used for training. Unfortunately they tend to get out of date quickly and cannot be customized. They can be a great resource for continuing training because they give further background and often provide visual aids.

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