

Designing & Delivering On-the-Job Training

Design Steps

The quality of any training effort is based largely on whether it is thought through and planned before any action is taken. A simple five step process, representing the basic instructional design principles, can help ensure success. Training Location Leaders are expected to have a basic knowledge of these steps and apply them to the training activities they conduct.

This does not mean that each time you conduct OJT with an employee some formal design process has to take place. What is intended is that you plan what you intend to do by thinking through the steps. With a little practice these steps become automatic and seamless, sort of like riding a bicycle. But until you do it a few times the process may seem awkward.

Step 1 - Once a legitimate training need has been established, the next major step is to design what goes into the training itself. Think about the learner in terms of how he/she learns best, what knowledge the employee brings to the event and how the trainee has performed so far. Think about the time you have. Don't try to cram too much into one session. The essence of this step is to establish performance objectives, which are expressions of the desired results of the training event. If not written down, at least have in your mind what you expect to happen. A simple example is, "The trainee will be able to set up a dumpy level." Also think through how you will evaluate or test the trainee to determine progress in learning.

Step 2 - Once the learning objectives are established, the development of the training can be accomplished. This step establishes the training strategies. A wide variety of options are available, and range from simply discussing an issue with a trainee, to hands-on doing, to field trips. Factor in what you have learned about adult learning and motivation to ensure the methods you choose are sound. Successful adult training is problem centered and experience centered. Active trainee participation, a supportive learning environment and feedback on learning progress are musts for quality adult training.

Step 3 - Make sure all the necessary equipment and materials you need to do quality training are in place before instruction begins. Being well organized will leave a lasting, positive impression on the trainee. If you are going to the field to do some hands-on training, make sure the site supports what you want to teach.

Step 4 - Success in delivery of training is based on the combined factors of subject matter knowledge and communication skills. Neither subject matter knowledge nor communication skills alone produce quality Training Location Leaders. Make sure you know your subject and hone your communication skills.

Step 5 - Be sure to evaluate the progress of anyone you are training. Do this often and provide feedback to the trainee frequently. Also evaluate your own performance as a trainer. Ask for feedback from the trainee.

Critical Elements of Learning

There are four critical elements of learning. These are:

- **motivation,**
- **reinforcement,**
- **retention, and**
- **transfer.**

Motivation - A learner must be motivated to learn before any learning takes place. Even the most accomplished trainer delivering the best material available will not get through to learners who remain indifferent or reluctant. Use of adult learning theory is the best way to motivate trainees to learn.

Reinforcement - Trainees must receive some encouragement or reward if learning is to continue. This reward need not be tangible. But learners need to experience a sense of progress or success. Nothing motivates further learning than the realization that one is learning something - nothing succeeds like success. As a trainer, design your activities to ensure learner success in the early stages of the training.

For reinforcement to be effective there must be feedback to convey and determine the results of the training. Feedback should occur both from you, the trainer, to the learner and from the learner to you. In this way all involved are given an opportunity to confirm progress, discuss concerns, and have input into the process.

Both positive and negative feedback will occur. Any negative feedback must be tactfully handled. And beware! Negative feedback should never be directed at an individual in front of peers.

Retention - To benefit from training, learners must retain learned information or skills. Your job as a trainer is not finished until you have assisted trainees to retain the information or skills taught. Retention is directly affected by the amount of practice carried out by a trainee. Practice should be emphasized early and frequently in the training to obtain the desired performance. After the desired performance is demonstrated, practice should be assigned on a periodic basis to maintain a high level of retention.

Transfer - As a Training Location Leader your job is not complete until you see that the training you and others provide is transferred to the job. Many barriers exist that can stop or hinder the transfer of training.

Motivating Trainees

Trainers can create a climate for learning by using techniques to gain and hold the interest of trainees and provide encouragement.

To do this it is necessary to be aware of several basic factors that serve as a source of motivation for trainees. The most important of these factors are:

- ❑ **Social relationships:** Adults seek out learning environments to meet a need for personal associations and friendships.
- ❑ **External expectations:** Adults learn in order to comply with formal authority.
- ❑ **Social welfare:** Adults seek learning to improve their ability to serve others.
- ❑ **Professional advancement:** Adults learn to advance in their careers.
- ❑ **Cognitive interest:** Adults learn for the sake of learning.

Put this knowledge into practice by utilizing the following mechanisms:

- ❑ Establish a friendly, open atmosphere that lets a trainee know you want to help them,
- ❑ Promote social interaction through training activities that involve other staff.
- ❑ Show trainees where the training will be applied in their work.
- ❑ Set an appropriate level of expectation. If stress is too high, it becomes a barrier to learning.
- ❑ Set an appropriate level of difficulty. Plan instruction to ensure learner success.
- ❑ Provide specific, frequent feedback to learners on their progress.
- ❑ Show learners what specific benefits will be realized from successfully completing the training.

These mechanisms are simple and easy to put into practice, but require some thought and planning as part of your preparation for training. They will not simply emerge.

Applying Adult Learning Theory

1. Adults have a need to know why they should learn something.

Adults spend a considerable amount of time and energy exploring what the benefits of them learning something and the costs of them not learning something before they are willing to invest time in learning it. It is seldom convincing for them to be told by someone (even the boss) that it would be good for them.

Training should be based on the valid needs of the trainee. The benefits of learning should be clearly shown. Activities should be based around real work experiences.

2. Adults have a deep need to be self-directing.

The psychological definition of "adult" is one who has achieved a self-concept of being in charge of his or her own life, of being responsible for making his or her own decisions and living with the consequences. Adults develop a deep need to be seen by others as being capable of taking responsibility for themselves. Too often as trainers we design training situations that place adults back in their childhood where they are told what where and when and how to learn. Self-directed is not the same as self-paced. Self-paced means that the learner is only in charge of when to experience what the trainer has produced. Self-directed learning puts the learner in charge of much more.

Incorporate as much "search and discovery" into the training as possible. Design training with as many options for learning as possible. For instance learning about the SWCD program in the field office could include a wide range of activities from reading the annual report, to attending a SWCD board meeting, to participating in special events sponsored by the SWCD.

3. Adults have a greater volume and different quality of experience than youth.

Adults bring into the learning situation a background of life experiences. Adults have a broader base of experience on which to attach new ideas and skills and give them richer meaning. The more explicit these relationships (between the old and the new) are made - through discussion and reflection - the deeper and more permanent the learning will be. Experience is to adults, the chief source of self-identity. If adults' experience is not made use of in a training experience the adults see it as a rejection of themselves.

Design training activities that reflect the actual work the learners perform. Provide activities that permit learners to compare the theoretical aspects of the training with their experiences.

4. Adults become ready to learn when they experience in their life situations a need to know or be able to do in order to perform more effectively and satisfyingly.

Some of the greatest goofs of training have occurred as a result of forcing people into training activities before they perceived a need for them. Adults again must see a need for training before learning will take place.

Provide training, as close to the time it is needed as possible. Don't give the trainee the job of simply "reading" the Field Office Technical Guide to keep them busy. Don't do an information dump on trainees, calling it training, and tell learners they need to know the information for future use. See 5 below.

5. Adults enter into a learning experience with a task-centered (or problem-centered or life-centered) orientation to learning.

Youth (conditioned by schools) have a subject-centered orientation to learning where they focus on learning content to pass a test. Adults by virtue of life and work experiences develop a task-centered or problem-centered orientation to learning. If training is developed around problem solving, then adults will learn content with the intention of *using* it.

Design training so that trainees are solving problems or are performing tasks as close to those encountered back on the job as possible. When large amounts of information support the problem solving activities, present this information as reference material. Teach learners how to use the information to successfully complete the problem solving activities. Again, don't do an information dump. Focus activities on "doing" something with information rather than simply "knowing" the information.

6. Adults are motivated to learn by both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators.

Adult learners respond to extrinsic motivators - promotion, bonuses, etc. - up to the point that they are reasonably well satisfied. But the more potent and persistent motivators are such intrinsic motivators as the need for self-esteem, broadened responsibilities, power, and achievement. And back to point one. Adults may not be motivated to learn what we tell them to learn unless they perceive a need to learn.

Learning activities should clearly demonstrate to the trainee where he or she would benefit in their jobs. Quality training is built around the concept of nourishing those intrinsic motivators. Learning feeds on itself and suggests to the trainee to become even more proficient in the job.

Barriers to the Transfer of Training

Barriers

Lack of reinforcement on the job

Interference from immediate work environment

Nonsupportive organizational culture

Trainee's perception of impractical training program

Trainee's perception of irrelevant training content

Trainee's discomfort with change and associated effort

Separation from inspiration or support of the trainer

Trainees' perception of poorly designed/delivered training

Pressure from peers to resist change

Actions to Overcome Barriers

Provide continual feedback to the trainee. Ask others to do likewise

Make sure that work assignments don't interfere with the trainee being able to put into practice what has been taught

Understand the culture of the NRCS and other cooperating organizations and learn to recognize when there is a non-supportive environment. Talk to the trainee about the issues.

Make sure training is practical. Talk to trainee about any perceived feelings.

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Look for signs of stress in the trainee and talk about change and performance expectations.

Provide support and encouragement to the trainee

Make sure that the training you and others provide is properly designed and delivered. Talk to the trainee about any perceived feelings.

Watch for any signs of peer pressure to that produces negative actions on the part of the trainee. Involve entire field office staff in training activities.