



Top 5 Training Mistakes

Facility Managers:

If you're planning any type of training for your O&M or leadership team, avoid these five common mistakes to get the most value out of your training investments.

1. Going in Blind

Never start the technical training process without first testing the applicants or participants. This test could be a self-assessment, a checklist of competencies and tasks, or a multiple-choice exam. Regardless of the format, take the time to understand what the baseline knowledge is among your staff before placing them in an instructional environment.

The assessment process is critical for several reasons:

It demonstrates individual commitment. Most technicians will accept an invitation for additional job training. To ensure that these participants aren't seeking an avenue to passively spend time, qualify their participation in the program. Assessments are a humbling experience; they're also a means for those interested in training to put some skin in the game. Individual ego and ability are exposed to management, which demonstrates a level of commitment to succeed in the training program.

It offers a metric to measure improvement in technical proficiency. If a proficiency baseline is established before the training process begins, then it can be measured against during and after training is complete. During training delivery, periodic assessments allow the trainer to gauge retention from his/her audience. Post-training assessments measure overall gains in competency and knowledge, which will be necessary when evaluating the effectiveness of the program itself. Additionally, these objective comparisons allow supervisors to measure technical competency between staff. Managers tend to qualitatively know how skilled their team is compared to their job requirements. The assessment offers a quantitative, data-driven metric which can be critical when making hiring or promotion decisions.

It clarifies the curriculum and overall training goals. How can you formulate a plan if you don't know what the end goal is? How can you determine the end without a beginning? The assessment process reveals gaps, some of which might be less obvious to the participant or his supervisor. The assessment might also reveal strengths that were otherwise unknown because an opportunity to utilize these skills hasn't yet been presented. If an individual's strengths and weaknesses are known and understood, then a training curriculum can be developed to fill his/her gaps and not waste time reviewing what he/she has already mastered.

It weeds out less qualified program candidates. The hard truth is that not everyone will succeed from training efforts. Avoid investing time, money, and other resources by screening training candidates. Sometimes those interested in the program simply aren't a good fit for the curriculum. It's not that any one individual can't benefit from training, but that particular program isn't set to the right degree of difficulty, pace, or subject matter for him/her.



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2. Implementing a Shotgun Approach with Too Many Staff or Too Much Content

Engaging Too Many Staff

Most of the time, when management decides to host a workshop or some other training forum internally, they want to pack the house with anyone and everyone they can find. Don't fall into this trap. Professional development is an individual process, and no two personal training plans will be identical to one another. Individuals learn concepts differently, have varying knowledge gaps, and master concepts at different paces. For these reasons, instruction should be focused and limited to a smaller target audience. In technical applications, especially if the curriculum is equipment-centric, then a classroom size of 5 to 10 is ideal.

Classroom sizes less than 5 individuals can still be effective, but obviously a smaller group will limit the potential for diverse thought leadership and engaging, yet constructive, dialogue. A cross-section of participants with varying levels of experience and background should be encouraged so they can bring that expertise with them to the learning environment.

Particularly for technically dense content, an instructional environment with 30 people is too big. Participants should feel comfortable asking questions and slowing down the content to dig into it as much as they want during the training session. Time simply won't allow for these breaks when the classroom size is too large. Just as importantly, the instruction won't resonate with everyone in the room – it'll be too advanced for some and too basic for others. To overcome this issue and reach a wider audience base, an instructor oftentimes dilutes the training content which results in a mediocre, canned lesson.

Cramming in Too Much Content at One Time

Training operation and maintenance staff is a huge investment. Beyond the time and resources required to train these individuals, managers must also consider the time spent away from their actual jobs. Consequently, many facility managers make the mistake of cramming too much information in at one time.

If a 2-hour session is set aside for 15 staff to participate in training, then 4 hours of content might be crammed into that same session. Obviously, this is not a wise approach and usually results in less learning than if 2 hours of content were covered in a 2-hour session. Technical overload leaves participants feeling tired, confused, overwhelmed, and unmotivated. Many of them will disengage from the training altogether because it simply becomes too challenging to keep up with the content at a rapid-fire pace.

Aim for 2-hour training sessions when working with technicians and operators. Adult learning should be purpose-driven; superfluous theory that doesn't directly apply to their jobs is usually a waste of their time. Adults learn best through mistakes, which is why instruction should include diagnostics, troubleshooting, real world scenarios, and lessons learned. With this mindset, limiting a session to 2 hours is much easier than if attempting to also add in working theories and irrelevant case study data.



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If logistics demand longer training sessions because of shift schedules or travel, then work in breaks every 90 minutes or so. This 90-minute training time allows the participants to re-frame their mindset to the curriculum, focus intently for approximately an hour, and then ask clarifying questions. Each 90-minute block should have a clear focus in content rather than covering many concepts in a short period of time.

For example, if the lesson is on air handling units, then go to the air handling unit rather than covering the many different types and configuration in a classroom. Have the participants identify the different components of that unit and discuss the purpose and function of each walk. Walk through the maintenance steps in detail - don't brush through them because you assume everyone knows them. Run through some common troubleshooting scenarios and create a dialogue among the group. Keep those 90 minutes focused on the one air handling unit to maximize retention and impact.

In short, slow down the learning process to yield the best results.

3. Allowing Too Much Time --- to Lapse in Between Training Sessions

Retention is a key element to the training process.

Even monthly training can be too sparse depending upon the technical density of the training curriculum. Participants forget up to half of the concepts covered within one training session within a matter of weeks, and sometimes days. Tactics to keep memory intact involve using the learned material as soon as possible. If the concepts are immediately applied through action or recalled in a follow-up lesson, then the probability that they'll be retained increases significantly.

The learning method known as "spaced repetition" draws a mathematical relationship between a person's ability to remember a new concept and the frequency to which the concept is repeated or practiced after period of memory breaks. Repeating and reviewing information increases the strength of the memory. Obviously, if training is too stretched out, then memory reinforcement is weakened.

As often as possible, deploy scenario-based training with real world examples. Teach, apply, and practice the concept with learners until it's mastered. The more often that technical teachings are repeated and applied, the stronger they're reinforced into individual memories, so the technicians can recall the lesson in the field when it really counts.



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4. Forgetting Human Resources

Training is a professional development exercise, and it would be a lost opportunity if facility managers didn't take the time to coordinate their training efforts with human resources.

Organizational alignment is the process of aligning strategic goals with the skills necessary to achieve those goals and with the personnel who possess these skills. Every job should have a job description, core competencies, and a salary range. Is every job description for your team current, and do they still make sense for your day-to-day operation? Are you specific with the credentials and certifications each job requires or even recommends? If not, then it's time to break out the red pen and sit down with HR.

Training should support an individual's career goals and the core competencies for his current position. If core competencies aren't established, or if they're outdated, then correct this deficiency before investing significant resources into training your staff.

For staff that require continuous education units (CEUs), then work with Human Resources to outline how each individual will attain these units. Avoid over-allocating resources to continuing education by first researching what free options are available. You might be surprised how much relevant, free, online content is published and available to facilities management staff.

5. Failing to Create a Cultural Shift

If you take nothing else from this guideline, understand this:

The most successful training programs and apprenticeships are those that engender a culture shift. Those fortunate enough to experience this profound transformation within their team and within their organization wouldn't dare ever go back to pre-training operation.

Cultural shifts gain traction at the individual level. Nothing is more precious to an organization than an employee who FEELS valued and consequently stands behind the organization's mission. Not even the dollars that come through the front door are more valuable than that employee. Revenue stream can ebb and flow; a loyal and appreciated employee will create lasting change that leaves a legacy because he will take ownership in his work and will make every effort to prove to himself and to the organization that his work matters.

Never underestimate the influence and value of mentorship. Seek opportunities to encourage mentorship and team engagement, especially adjacent to or during training initiatives. Reinforce to your team that training extends beyond the moment, the session, or the classroom – training occurs every day because it's so ingrained in the organization's culture.



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Training shouldn't be a one-time occurrence. A single training session, workshop, or program isn't adequate to achieve sustained results. Learning is a process that doesn't really stop. In your efforts to empower staff with continuous training, investigate new topics or industry platforms for them to continue their training experience. Continue to explore what else is out there and don't become complacent with your staff's knowledge base. Even if your staff graduates from a program, establish a means for them to continue their education, either internally or externally. Whether the continuous training is monthly or annual, it will support retention so that the initial training effort won't be wasted.

One last point:

As a leader, engage in the program, too. Communicate to your staff that training is a priority by participating in as much of the workshops, sessions, programs, etc. with them. It's very rare that you'll have the opportunity to explicitly demonstrate that you are one of them – don't waste this one.