

Employee Training: Investment in Human Resources

by Peter Martell

Just as an investment of capital is required to build a facility and open a business, so is an investment in human resources required to professionally operate a business. This investment in human resources is called training – and the amount of time, effort and expense invested in employee training will often determine not only the attitude and ability of the employees performing their jobs but also the quality of programs, services and facilities experienced by patrons.

It is the responsibility of the facility manager to see that all employees are properly trained. A manager can only feel confident in the staff's ability to perform their jobs by first hiring the right people and secondly training them in the knowledge and ability to perform their jobs properly.

Every employee should feel that he or she is working with the manager and other staff members and that no job or position is more important than another. The manager must be able to convey interest in and care about the positions and performances of all staff members. Employee performance and morale are often directly proportional to the ability of the manager to motivate, communicate with, and work alongside fellow staff members. A good manager will be careful not to intimidate employees as a means to accomplishing anything. Management is the art of getting things done with people. Usually, managers will gain more respect and cooperation by asking employees to do something rather than commanding them.

It is human nature to want to learn. However, people cannot be forced to learn. Sometimes they must first be convinced “how” to do something and then to actually do it. Sometimes when staff members fail to perform up to expectations it is the fault of management because:

- a. Employees don't know what is expected of them.
- b. They don't know how to perform the tasks required.
- c. They are, in some way, prevented from doing their job.
- d. They lack the proper initiative.

Management needs to constantly evaluate the facility's overall operation to identify problem areas or employees who require additional training. Reviewing staff competencies during formal performance evaluations may also identify staff or management deficiencies in the training process.

Every facility needs to have a formal training program for its employees. Training should begin at the top with management and supervisory personnel. Once members of management are properly trained in their respective areas of responsibility (or multiple areas) they will be able to conduct or supervise the training of others. In order to conduct a training program, a variety of tools are required in addition to human resources. Among those tools or materials frequently used are:

- Policies and Procedures Manual – Every facility should develop a Policies and Procedures Manual that formalizes in writing everything from the vision and mission of the business to the policies, procedures and methods utilized in every facet of the operation. All management personnel should be thoroughly familiar with the Policies and Procedures Manual and should utilize it during the training of others.

While one of the purposes of a formal Policies and Procedures Manual is to provide and ensure

consistency in the facility's methods of operation, it should not remain stagnant but should be revised regularly to reflect changes and improvements in operating policies or procedures.

- **Training Manual** – In addition to a Policies and Procedures Manual, many businesses utilize a Training Manual (or series of training manuals) for specific departments or jobs. Usually these tend to be more task and skill specific, outlining proper methods and procedures for performing specific functions as opposed to general policies. Such manuals usually begin by identifying the skill(s) to be learned, followed by some method for evaluation of the employee's progress. In some cases (such as ice resurfacers), there are excellent training materials provided by the manufacturers of equipment required to perform certain tasks. In such cases, these manuals should be used as a resource during the training process. In addition, especially where certain tools or equipment are required (such as an ice edger, skate sharpening machine, ice resurfacer, or POS system) a formal written record of the training process and skill mastery should be completed and kept in the employee's personnel file.
- **Staff Meetings** – Regular staff meetings should be part of every facility's training program. Meetings should not be long or tedious but rather brief, interactive and informative. Meetings can cover a variety of subjects or one specific topic. A written record of all staff meetings should be kept in the company's personnel files.
- **Audio-Visual Instruction** – With advancements in technology, many jobs can be taught with the aid of video, compact disc or internet-based instructional programs. Such tools are particularly helpful for people who are visual as opposed to auditory learners. Such tools are especially useful as they can be loaned to employees to view or listen to independently – saving time and money required for on-the-job training. Many equipment manufacturers supply training videos or CDs on the correct methods of operation and maintenance of their equipment.
- **Professional Training** – Outside professional training is beneficial and rewarding for both the employee and employer. While an investment of time and money is required, the employee will almost always acquire some knowledge or techniques that he or she would not have learned on the job and invariably they will return to work more enthusiastic, invigorated and motivated than before. The fact that the employer valued and cared enough about employees to send them to such a program also helps to develop a sense of loyalty and appreciation on the part of the employees. Facilities should always budget some money for personnel development annually.

While each staff member needs to learn the skills specific to his/her area of responsibility, it is also advisable for staff members to be cross-trained in several different areas. This will greatly enhance the flexibility and efficiency with which the manager can schedule and operate the facility. Since cross-training is valuable and cost-effective, many companies reward employees for mastering additional skills with a small bonus or increase in pay.

Another benefit of cross-training is that it promotes teamwork, which should be an objective of every manager. Just like any athletic team, the collective efforts of the entire staff will far outperform the singular efforts of individual staff members.

Conclusion: Orientation and training of employees is critically important if a facility is to provide the quality of programs and services necessary to be successful. Arena owners and operators who invest millions of dollars in land, equipment and facilities but try to save on time, effort and money required to properly orient and train staff are “penny wise and pound foolish.”

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