

Good managers know that the time expended in employee training is more than compensated for in employee loyalty, better equipment maintenance, less lost work time, less equipment down time, fewer insurance claims and reduced liability. Philip Michael Sharples takes a look at...

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Routine golf course maintenance tasks require a unique combination of equipment knowledge and operational skill, persistence, an understanding of golf, a keen sense of aesthetics and a broad based knowledge of turfgrass management practices. Maintenance tasks must be performed quickly and regularly, but always with safety and precision.

Golf course employees perform many different tasks involving some of the most expensive agricultural and horticultural machinery in the world, while remaining aware of golfers and other activities surrounding them.

So, here we are in our golf industry, which is quite often a major contributor to the revenue from tourism in many countries across the world. Yet no significant or 'standardised' courses of on-the-job training for employees using mechanical equipment have been established.

In many instances performance of employees could be directly attributed to the techniques and calibre of the Course Manager or informational content supplied with the particular machine in question. All of these could and should be regarded as unsatisfactory training methods.

I would like to make it clear that the above is by no means stating that the National Standards in educational qualifications are not significant or standardised but is purely aimed at on-the-job training issues, functions and delivery. The GTC along with their partner colleges have played vital roles in ensuring relevant and quality work-based greenkeeper qualifications such as N/SVQ's are available.

So, where is this leading to? Well, three years ago, in my final year of study for an HND at Myerscough College I produced a Thesis specifically aimed at the subject of on-the-job training due to the aforementioned points and I would like to briefly share some of my findings with you. What I hoped to gain was a deeper understanding of employee training and mechanical training issues specific to golf course management.

To provide information toward future training programmes and to benefit management practices, while expanding the professionalism needed to keep up with technological advancements in respect of machinery and the golf courses of the future.

Training and the organisation

The last decade has seen a resurgence of interest in the training provided by employers - the courses, events and on-the-job activities that an organisation arranges for its workforce. A dramatic increase has been seen in the provision of educational courses and companies are now competing to recruit and retain the 'knowledge worker'.

The aim of training is to modify or develop the knowledge, skills and attitude through learning experience, to achieve performance in an activity or a range of activities. Its purpose in the work situation is to enable an individual to acquire abilities in order that he or she can perform adequately a given task or job.

Training provides benefits to both the employees and the organisation; trainees may gain greater intrinsic or extrinsic job satisfaction. Intrinsic job satisfaction may come

from performing a task well and from being able to exercise a new repertoire of skills. Extrinsic job satisfaction may be derived from extra earnings accrued through improved job performance and the enhancement of career and promotional prospects, both within and outside the organisation.

Benefits for the organisation include improved employees work performance and productivity; shorter learning time which could lead to less costly training and employees being "on-line" more quickly; decrease in wastage; fewer accidents; less absenteeism, lower labour turnover and perhaps most importantly greater customer or client satisfaction.

To summarise, I suggest that in preparing an individual to perform a specific task more effectively, training can contribute to the organisation achieving its current objectives. Although more importantly in some respects is the influence that the content and conduct of training can have on the attitudes towards the processes of learning and development. This in turn can create a "learning organisation" that is more flexible and responsive in coping with present and future internal and external demands.

On-the-job training

On-the-job training is a key way of progressing new recruits, developing apprentices or other long-term trainees, teaching employees new skills when new equipment and methods are introduced and a way of updating and upgrading new skills.

At the crudest level on-the-job training can be taught informally to

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the newcomer or inexperienced by an experienced worker already doing the job to be mastered. This can be successful if the skills can be easily mastered, if the experienced worker has instructional skills, can spare time to instruct and possesses current knowledge of the best work methods.

At a more sophisticated level the trainee can be given opportunities to learn through the use of brief induction programmes, by changing jobs at planned intervals (job rotation) and by means of coaching.

In a profession where the potential for accidents is high the implementation of an on-the-job training programme has a number of potential possibilities.

a) Prevention of serious accidents, alleviating the possible future suffering of an employee and the resultant absence of that employee.

b) Improved quality, quantity and efficiency of workmanship.

c) Better uniformity of workmanship if each employee has received the same training.

d) A significant reduction of equipment breakdown. Operators are taught to correctly operate their assigned equipment and carry out correct daily maintenance.

e) Prevention of legal action aimed at you or your company.

f) An effective training programme can help show your employees that you care for their welfare.

This leads on to be specific advantages and disadvantages associated with on-the-job training:

Advantages

a) It is less costly than off-the-job training because it uses normal equipment in normal surroundings.

b) Learning will take place on the equipment, which will actually be used when the trainee is proficient; there are no transfer of learning problems.

c) The trainee is in the "production" environment from the beginning; he or she does not have to adjust to it after the rather sheltered conditions of off-the-job training.

d) Trainees who are currently studying in an off-the-job environment will feel more competent and eager in learning to learn at the place of study.

Disadvantages

a) The instructor (usually a supervisor or trusted worker) may have limited teaching experience and may not have enough time to give proper training.

b) The trainee may be exposed to bad methods and learn these instead of more efficient methods.

c) There is a risk of damage to valuable equipment.

d) There is a risk of spoiled or damaged work being produced.

Data needed to design and implement training programmes for the organisation or the manager are notoriously difficult to understand and produce. I found for the needs of our industry the most relevant and easily achievable route to be a systematic training model that is based on a continuous loop. This has two key characteristics - Training can be perceived as a sequential set of steps and identification of needs can be introduced into the training cycle at the appropriate stage. The subjects that require attention are set in the correct order of attention which follows:

Identification of learning require-

ments; Job analysis; Training objectives; Training Strategy; Design and delivery of training and lastly but most importantly Evaluation of learning.

All these subject areas should be discussed in detail and are all extremely important to successful training but for the purposes of this article I am afraid will have to be skipped over. Copies of my thesis which explains fully all the above and sets out three on-the-job training programmes written with this model namely verbal, visual and written can be made available to interested parties by application to the Principal at Myerscough College.

Being a Course Manager with time constraints, and I suspect lack of an organisational support group, a more reasonable approach to on-the-job training might come from the Training Within Industry model. This was originally established in the USA during the Second World War. It is probably the most commonly used approach in both the USA and the UK.

When drawing up an outline plan for training, trainers will need to bear in mind the nature of the learning group or learner; training content; performance criteria; timing and duration of the training sessions, and guidance and assessment procedures. One of the first steps any trainer must take should be of attaining a D32/D33 assessor qualification.

I feel the future holds many new challenges and innovations for our profession and full scale on-the-job training programmes will need to be designed and implemented as a matter of course. Only time and effort will tell!

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