

Learning & Development

ON-THE-JOB TRAINING THAT STICKS

By Keith Jaynes

Performance is made up of three key components: knowledge, skills and attitude. Each is acquired in different ways, which means that providing balanced learning and performance management programmes forms a central part of the Course Manager job.

Think about riding a bike. No child gets straight onto their first two-wheeler and rides without a few spills in the process. How few spills and how long the process takes before that child can ride competently is in the hands of the parent as a teacher and the child as the learner. This involves not just providing the opportunities to learn but the motivation, too.

This model works in the same way for on the job skills training.

Not surprisingly, it makes little difference how much knowledge the members of your greenkeeping team have or how skillful they are. If they don't have a positive attitude to their work, performance will suffer. Therefore a key part of the management process is to create a working environment that provides inherent motivation for all. More of this later.

A visit to the website (www.the-gtc.co.uk) makes clear that golf has a well-structured approach to training and development, resourced by professionals. This is backed by a solid infrastructure, with a national network of accredited training providers at colleges specialising in land-based studies; and a framework of NVQ qualifications from Levels 2 to 4 devised in conjunction with the industry to promote acceptable common standards of performance nationally.

However, as David Golding notes, it does take a commitment from senior greenkeeping staff to support learners at individual clubs. Successful training needs to be systematic, particularly at entry levels, to ensure it can withstand changes in budgets, resources and work schedules.

There are all kinds of methods for planning and delivering on-the-job training, but the process outlined below offers a time- and cost-effective solution for busy Course Managers.

Some years ago, in the era of government training boards, the Food Drink and Tobacco Industry Training Board introduced a simple method of breaking down 'jobs' into their component tasks or modules.

Initially this was launched as the Meat Module programme – designed to build craft skills in abattoirs and wholesale butchery businesses. So how does a system designed in the meat industry have any relevance to the turfcare business?

The programme had two elements – first a series of module cards that defined the learning elements of each of the tasks that comprise a

particular job. The second was a matrix that listed all the different tasks in addition to the competence of each member of the team to perform them.

1: MODULE CARDS. Every task in a job can be broken down by simply questioning how it should be performed. 'Open' questions are required to analyse the processes involved and, hence, the skills and knowledge required for effective performance.

Open questions are designed to gather information in a challenging way. For example, if a key task were to set up a greensmower for a range of conditions, then some of the questions might be:

- What safety steps are essential before setting the cutters?
- What controls adjust the height of cut?
- Where are they located?
- How are they operated and in what order?

The questions are recorded on cards with the answers on the opposite side. (FIG_01)

FIG_01

SEAT FIXING & ADJUSTMENT

- 1 How is the seat fixed in position?
- 2 How can the seat be moved?
- 3 How can you tell that the seat is correctly fixed in position?
- 4 How many different position controls are there for the seat?
- 5 Where are they located?
- 6 How are they operated?
- 7 What safety measures should be observed when moving the position of the seat?

Seat Fixing & Adjustment

- 1 The seat is fixed by a lock on the lhs of the pedestal. It operates with a spring-loaded pin that engages in the lock.
- 2 Disengage the locking pin by pulling it out and turning it to the right and turn the seat 180 degrees to face the rear. Twist the locking pin to the left so it can engage in the lock.
- 3 When the seat is correctly positioned, the locking pin is fully engaged.
- 4 There are two controls, one for height the other for rake.
- 5 Height adjustment lever is under the seat, rake adjustment a knurled knob on the rhs of the frame.
- 6 Height is adjusted by lifting the lever. Ensure weight is off seat to raise it and on seat to lower. Turn the knurled knob forward to decrease rake and backward to increase rake.
- 7 Never drive with the seat unlocked – safety interlock should prevent this and do not attempt to adjust the seat while driving.

Any skilled operator could provide the ‘right’ answers matched to the specific machine and the standards of performance expected by the club.

Some answers will also be in the machinery manufacturer’s handbook – particularly for safety issues.

The NVQ structure lends itself to this type of instructional approach. For their standards are made up of groups of units that specify the tasks involved in a particular job role. The units are made up of elements – each of which defines a specific work activity. While performance criteria define what needs to be done to perform the task to an acceptable standard – with national standards already defined by the GTC.

Of course, the busy Course Manager will argue that there is already enough to do without developing something new. Plus the fact that the real trick is to ask the right questions in the right order, which is probably easier for professional trainers. However, if the manager’s job incorporates staff training then the one-off investment in the time involved is probably worthwhile, since it can be used again and again to meet the needs of new staff or to give existing employees refresher training in areas they may not encounter frequently.

This means that the whole team can be involved in the process as part of a standards-driven initiative – what’s more, the cards provide a central resource that can be tapped at any time.

2. RECORD OF TRAINING. Much of the impetus for learning comes from the priority that it is given by the manager. If it is high-profile, team members readily accept its importance and their responsibility in the process. This is where the Record of Training, mounted openly on the notice board in the staff room or workshop, provides not only a record of training but some added motivation for trainees.

The format is a simple matrix (**FIG 02**). Along the top are noted all the different tasks that are required by the team, while team members’ names are shown down the side. Competence in each task is noted using a simple key. Tasks in which team members require training as part of their jobs are noted using a minus symbol (-); once they are undergoing training this changes to a plus symbol (+); finally, when they have proved their competence the plus symbol is converted into an asterisk (*).

This provides an immediate visible guide to the overall competence of the team at any given time. It also acts as a reminder to the manager and team members about “gaps” in key competencies where further training is essential to ensure that adequate cover is available for holidays and sickness. Knowledge and skills are about learning and training. Performance is about attitude.

Here the supply trade has some lessons for the turfcare industry. Sales people face a roller-coaster ride of highs and lows as some customers buy and others do not. For them, performance is often more a question of application and perseverance than shortcomings in knowledge and skill. All too often a small deficiency in skill can mean the difference between success and failure.

Because of the pressures faced by the supply trade to cut costs, the structures of today’s dealerships are ‘flatter’ as layers of management are cut out. One such layer has been the sales manager, who would

accompany his sales people to ensure that they were performing up to the standards expected.

FIG 02

Task Number:	1	2	3	4	5	6													14						
Team Member 1	-	-	-	+	+																				
Team Member 2	*	*	-	*	*	*													*						
Team Member 3	*	-	*	*	*	*																			
Team Member 4	+	-	*	*	*	*													*						

One of the sales manager’s key skills was to act as a coach and trainer to his sales team, remedying areas where performance improvement was required. In some cases, less experienced sales people required further training, which the manager would organise off the job, while experienced team members might simply have needed to refocus on one or two areas in which their skills or knowledge had been eroded.

The same model works just as well for the Course Manager. Performance involves everybody in the team, not just those under training or with limited experience. In fact, more-experienced members of the team can contribute significantly to the development process if their experience can be harnessed as part of the training process.

Spending time with individual members as they go about their daily routines may highlight development areas that can benefit the whole team. Similarly, involving the whole team in identifying ways to improve performance can also have a very positive impact on results and raising standards beyond those set in national programmes.

If managers ever doubt their role and responsibility for on-the-job training they should always fall back on the proven training maxim: “What I hear I forget, What I see I remember but What I do I understand”.

Similarly, the manager’s prayer is well worth a mention here, too, because it highlights the reality that good management is about doing that little bit extra to achieve the best results. And since managing is normally about getting results through people, that must mean going the extra mile on the development front.

So “Lord grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to tell the difference.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Keith Jaynes has over 30 years’ experience in land-based industries. His company specialises in providing marketing and sales development solutions for machinery manufacturers, distributors and financial services companies operating in this sector. For more information about the modular training approach you can contact Keith on 01904 448740 or 07776 197497.

