

# TRAINING INSURANCE

Just because you've spent time and money training employees doesn't necessarily mean they've learned anything. Here's how to make sure they absorb new information to apply to their job.

by Lawrence Kokkelenberg, Ph.D.

**N**ow that it is winter, training time is again upon us. Lawn and landscape companies all over America start training or send their employees to trade shows, conventions, conferences and seminars.

Employees attend these functions and when the spring begins, little—if anything—is different. In fact, the company may have done itself a disservice rather than the intended good that was hoped for.

Why has this happened? Because of a fundamental mistake: there is a difference between classroom learning and on-the-job performance.

When an employee returns from a training program, we assume the following:

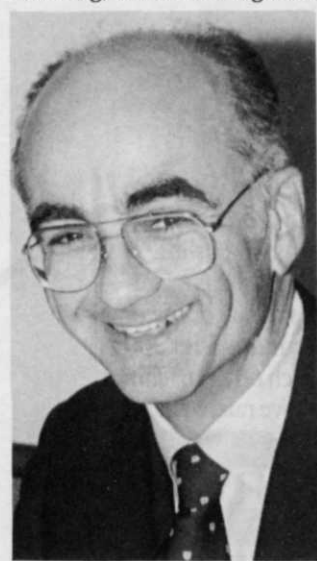
1. The training was successful (learning took place);
2. That learning will translate into on-the-job skills;
3. That management or the company has little additional responsibilities.

Let's explore these assumptions and find out how an organization can truly maximize its training dollars.

## Lighting the bulb

In order for training to be successful, learning must take place. Learning implies understanding. Understanding is heavily dependent on the ability of the instructor to communicate and to some extent, the ability of the attendee to listen, focus and be involved.

Learning, unfortunately, does not always take place. In some cases, it takes place only minimally. To increase learning, the following actions are recommended:



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1. Inform employees who are to attend what you expect them to learn. Tell them why they were selected and what expectations you have for applying what they learn.

2. Inform employees that when the training program is completed there will be a follow-up session within one week. Ensure that this follow-up session takes place. Inform employees that during this follow-up, they will have to make a 15-minute (or longer) presentation on what they remember from the program. This should either get them to pay more attention during the training, or at least make them review their notes.

3. Have all employees who were present in the training complete a true/

false test or an exam after the training. This will reinforce the training session and ensure their learning.

4. Prior to the training program, ask the trainees to draw up a list of items they would like to learn while in training. The training is more exciting and more relevant when it is learner-requested.

All these things clearly help the employee prepare for learning. The employee will be more attentive during the program, and you will have done your part. The rest is up to the instructor.

Once learning takes place, it must have relevance to the employee's job or it will quickly be forgotten. Immediate application allows for relevance and a critical and necessary opportunity to practice the new knowledge. An organization must do more than permit usage—it must foster, promote, and even demand that the employee's new knowledge be used on the job.

## Using new skills

What will the employee do differently? What ideas does the employee have as a result of attending the program? How does the employee think they will implement any of these ideas?

Questions like these encourage the employee to use these skills on the job.

Management, in order to receive the greatest return on investment for training dollars, must support the employee's learning and practice. Support after the training program can come in many ways.

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- Management can now make the employee's new skills part of their performance appraisal.

- Management can send out six-week and six-month surveys asking employees if what they learned at training is still being used.

- Management can give additional responsibilities and authority to help these individuals use what they learned.

- Management can follow up employee learning to see if they are using any new skills.

- Management can ask employees to train or lead others.

- Management should always be a model.

Any company that merely sends its employees to a convention or training program, asks "how was it?," and then returns to business as usual would do better to keep the money in the bank. Any company that trains its employees and then promptly forgets about the training—

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never following it up, assuming the employee has learned and retained the information—would also do better to keep the money in the bank.

The purpose of training is to develop new skills in the participants. Training in the classroom usually does not develop new skills. Learning that takes place in the classroom is only part of the training process. In the classroom, learning takes place because of the content, the success of the instructor, the attention and listening skills of the participants. Learning demands comprehension.

### Making sure

Skills are developed through practice, feedback, job relevance, reward and recognition. These factors take place on the job, after the classroom learning has been completed. It is managers' and supervisors' responsibilities to make sure



Are these guys learning anything? It may depend on whether or not their boss took the time to prepare them properly for the seminar.

that learnings from the classroom become translated into on-the-job new skills.

To make training profitable:

- Select your people carefully and with purpose;
- Inform them in advance of your requirement and expectations;
- Review their learnings immediately upon return;
- Expect and plan for on-the-job performance translation/improvement;
- Follow it up in one or more ways for six months.

If we all do our jobs, training *does* pay and *does* translate into on-the-job performance improvement, lower turnover, higher productivity and higher quality. Training takes classroom time and on-the-job practice. Training can be costly, but then again, consider the cost of ignorance, turnover and callbacks.

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