

No Train, No Gain!

By George Hedley—SEAA Keynote Speaker for 2014 Convention in Dallas, TX



Do you sometimes wish your managers and field crews were as good as you? Do they often struggle or fail to do things the way you want them done? Are your people as efficient and productive as they should be? Do your employees sit and wait for their boss to make simple decisions for them? Or, do your people constantly improve, try new ways to do things, and pro-actively make changes and master new tasks?

Human nature is to stay put and do things the same way as they have before. For example, how do you drive to work? The same way every day! People don't like to change and, therefore, won't try new ideas on their own unless they have no other choices. Improvement requires people to change. Most people want to do better, learn new things and grow. Training is the best method to encourage and make your people change and improve.

Are you too busy to train?

As construction companies grow, the owner takes on more work than he or she can handle alone. Therefore he or she hires some help to assist. Then as the crew grows and daily job pressures mount, the owner has difficulty finding good help to delegate responsibility to. They know they should train their people but don't take the time. They become too busy to train and be at every jobsite all the time. What should they do?

Most continue to try and make all important decisions themselves and control everything. This never works as employees are held back and not allowed to grow. This causes field productivity to decrease and jobs costs to increase. And then, good employees leave for better opportunities. What's your decision regarding investing in training?

Productivity in construction is at an all-time low compared to other industries. The average construction field worker only averages between four to five hours per day doing productive work. The other lost hours are spent waiting for their boss to show or tell them what to do, looking busy, correcting other's mistakes, or working with the wrong tools or equipment.

Most small- and medium-size construction companies don't have formal training programs. Consider the old method of distributing project information via blueprints versus today's laptop computers, tablets, e-mail, and project websites. In today's high-tech, high-speed business environment, people need to learn and improve just to stay relevant. Maybe your firm is too busy to train because you expect people to learn in a vacuum, or by the trial and error method, or from their previous boss at their last company.

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336-294-8880

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People want to make meaningful contributions on the job. But if they don't get the training and tools they need, they won't accept responsibility for the quality and productivity of work they do and won't grow into productive team players.

Training involves doing!

You can't afford not to train. The first decision to start an effective company training program is to do it during regular working hours as a mandatory priority for everyone. Dedicate at least 30 minutes to training employees every week. This only amounts to 2.5 percent of your total payroll cost. An organized training program will improve your bottom-line significantly more than 2.5%.

Determine the 25 most important weekly training topics each employee type needs to know. For example, field concrete workers need to know how to form a building slab properly, where to install slab expansion joints, how to install steel embeds and anchor bolts, and how to fill out a timecard properly. Design learning sessions for each area and repeat them every 6 months to reinforce the basics.

Conduct training sessions in an interactive format versus the old classroom style of teaching where the teacher only tells the people what to do. Think coaching versus teaching and telling. Coaches explain, use examples, and get people doing exercises to encourage real learning. In group settings, select different people to lead your weekly training sessions, so everyone gets a chance to teach and be responsible for an area of workmanship. Assign topics to individuals based on their experiences and skills. Get people to stand up, participate, use tools, install materials, use equipment, and do it until they get it right.

Work together to learn together!

Offsite seminars and workshops can also be excellent training opportunities. But make sure your training programs offer more than listening to instructors. Good training involves coaching, interaction, doing, and feedback. As a professional speaker and trainer at several company meetings every year, I see lots of bad examples of training programs where the agenda includes training sessions, but no real learning happens. Some companies try to do all their training at one big annual meeting for their entire staff. The audience watches boring technical presentations or listens to a company manager read information to the group. The audience doesn't participate in activities or provide input, and therefore doesn't learn how to implement any new skills being taught. They sit there, listen, and try to stay awake. And then, back on the job the next day, they continue to do their job exactly as they did before.

I also speak at a lot of great annual training meetings and conventions where effective learning does take place. Meetings can be an excellent training opportunity if organized properly and then combined with effective ongoing weekly companywide training sessions. To round out and improve your annual training, be sure to include interactive training, feedback, fun, motivation, rewards, excitement, and recognition.

To get started, form a company improvement committee that meets monthly. Task them with the responsibility to design your ongoing company training program. Let them develop your training ladder, topics, schedule, and format for implementation. By involving many of your key employees in this effort,

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everyone will get onboard and make this program a success. To help you set your training goals and targets, email GH@HardhatPresentations.com to get a "Write Winning Targets & Goals" e-book.

*Keynote speaker for SEAA's 2014 convention, **George Hedley** works with contractors to build profitable growing companies. He is a professional business coach, popular speaker and best-selling author of "**Get Your Business To Work!**" available online at www.HardhatPresentations.com. To sign-up for his free e-newsletter, join his next webinar, be part of a **BIZCOACH** program, or get a \$100 discount coupon for online classes at www.HardhatBizSchool.com, e-mail GH@HardhatPresentations.com*