



THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO TRAINING IN THE LAB

Part one

You know that having competent, well-trained staff ensures the stability and reputation of your business. A dedicated and skilled workforce allows for innovation and helps your business to stay ahead of the curve and to flourish.

And that's why you've put together a training plan for each of your employees. This plan runs from their first day, through current tasks, updating, upskilling and soft skills. It includes information on mentoring and career progression. Naturally, this plan is part of your overall employee training program.

Now let's say you know someone who doesn't have this in place (we know you're asking for a friend). What would such a program look like?

Fortunately for your friend, we're here to help.

The importance of training

We've written previously about why training is important. In summary, training can benefit an organisation by:

- * Keeping employees motivated
- * Improving productivity and performance
- * Addressing skills gaps
- * Increasing staff retention and loyalty
- * Maintaining consistency
- * Attracting new talent
- * Staying ahead of the competition

Training your staff requires a careful and consistent approach to ensure the needs of individuals and the business are being met. Setting up a system to make sure that training is being carried out in the best interests of all stakeholders is your first priority.

Reskilling and upskilling

While The Great Resignation may not have hit your business, transforming the people you have into the people you need makes good sense.

Reskilling and upskilling also means retaining that corporate knowledge gained by your current staff. Replacing staff means you have to hire new people. New hires take a while to get up to speed and losing that knowledge of 'how we do it around here' means losing a sense of connectedness within a business.

It also makes sense to ensure that the skills you're providing are the skills your people need to thrive and succeed.

So, what do you need to do to ensure training satisfaction and relevant knowledge for your training plan? Well, like all good scientists, you need to gather data.

What do they have?

Starting with a skills audit is great way to begin. This is where you map out the skills and competencies of your staff as they stand today.

It's just as important to get your staff to do their own version of a skills audit. You might be surprised at some of their hidden talents that are underutilised.

What do they need?

What do they need to know? Map out what knowledge and skills individuals require to carry out their jobs successfully. Begin with foundational knowledge and graduate to more advanced training. The skills and knowledge should build on previous training.

Identify individual training gaps. If they lack skills in certain areas, the training will be ineffective. Dropping someone into a training course in Advanced Excel is pointless if their previous experience is limited to recognising a spreadsheet when they see one.

What does the business need?

Does the training align with your business goals? Obviously, Individual goals are important. But it's just

as important to ensure those learning objectives align with your current and future business goals.

Are you trying to reduce staff turnover?
Do you have a new product or service and need to ensure staff are up to speed with the details?

These sorts of questions will help to shape your training plans.

Identify future gaps. Training isn't just about meeting current business needs. You also need to consider future challenges.

Do you have a highly experienced workforce?
Or are most of your staff recent graduates?

Focussing on what you have and what you need will help to home in on potential skill gaps.

Where is your workforce? If you have a single lab with everyone sharing the same building, then this won't necessarily be relevant to you. However, if your staff are scattered or work remotely, you must consider how everyone will be included.

A robust needs assessment will pinpoint the knowledge and skills required at task, personal, program and organisation level. This data will allow leaders to target gaps with relevant and timely training and development.

We have some suggestions on how to do this. However, if you'd like some support with this critical step, we're able to help.

Collecting the information

There are several methods of assessing current knowledge of employees.

One option is a self-evaluation assessment through questionnaires or quizzes. As well as pinpointing their strengths and weaknesses, this should give participants a sense of control about their learning.

This is also a good opportunity to find out what type of learner they are.

Do they prefer to learn in small groups or with a mentor?
Is online training effective for them or do they like working through a hard copy workbook?

This information will help you make decisions about the type of training you offer. It will also help inform where you invest your budget.

For example, you could discover that many staff prefer face-to-face training but are happy to use online for say, mandatory OHS sessions.

Developing online modules takes time and can be a substantial financial investment. Knowing this information in advance means that you can make plans that are more likely to be well-received by staff.

Managers should also complete assessments on their staff. This should include the skills requirements for current and future roles and consider the needs of the lab.

A need or a want?

It's important for staff members to have some say in shaping their training. By having input, they're more likely to be motivated to stick with the program.

However, consideration should be given to whether their training requests are a 'want' or a 'need'. Priority should also be given to training that has immediate benefit.

For example, a staff member may request an advanced course in Microsoft Word because they believe this will help them write better fortnightly reports. However, their manager would prefer they become more proficient in using Excel which is a program they use every day. While the Word training may not happen initially, it can be included as part of their ongoing training plan.

The results of these combined assessments should give a clear path for individual staff members.

Having individual plans also means being able to personalise not only the learning journey but also career paths. In this case it's more about skill building than skill gaps, providing staff members with a 'career compass' to move within the company.

This makes good sense for staff and your business since retaining good staff is a much better and more cost-effective option than training new ones. Providing a robust learning and development program will help your business to attract and retain top talent.

Keeping training relevant

If you've ever run a training course, you'll know that there will always be an array of skills and abilities in the room.

Maybe they've all turned up to a course about internal audits. But in that group, there will be people who've been part of an audit, some who've actually carried out an audit and some whose experience is limited to spelling 'audit' correctly.

Having staff members attending training courses together can be a valuable bonding experience.

But for those with existing knowledge or experience, the slow pace of a 'one size fits all' training course can lead to negative feedback and frustration.

By using the combined assessment results, you will be able to group staff members into segments that match their current abilities and future goals.

In summary

This investigative part of the process should not be rushed.

Training involves time, energy, and expense, not just for the business but also for your staff.

If you need some help with this, we're available to provide support.

Contact Maree (0411 540 709), Diane (0402 012 781) or email info@masmanagementsystems.com.au to set up a confidential discussion.

The next training article will explore how to deliver effective training.

Remember, you don't have to do this alone!

