



CT Technology Transfer Center

Supervisor's Signpost 2017-1

You're Also a Teacher

You're busy every day doing your scheduled jobs, learning new ones, and switching off to other ones that come up suddenly and have to be done right away.

There's always something to do.

But every now and then there's one more thing you are called upon to do, and it's an important one: you need to teach someone else how to do something that you know how to do. Yes, you're called upon to be a teacher. You may feel confident when you do it, or maybe not, but take heart. It's easier than you think because 1) you don't have to be a college professor to teach someone how to do something and 2) there's a simple four-step process of communicating information to a coworker in a limited amount of time. We call it "training on the fly."

Step 1: Prepare the Learner

Yes, there is a step before the actual teaching, and it's an important one: helping the person receive the learning that is about to follow. This is done by explaining what the goal of learning is. Sometimes even experienced teachers forget to begin by outlining what is to be covered and why it is important. The learner needs to know what he/she will be able to do once the task is mastered. Asking them if they've ever attempted this kind of work before will tell you if you need to start explaining things at the very beginning or at a more advanced level. It is also important to help the person relax. Explain that you are not expecting perfection the first time, and encourage him/her to ask questions if they are confused. It is crucial to treat all questions with respect. If you criticize someone for asking a question, that's the last time they'll let you know they don't understand something.

Step 2: Deliver the Lesson

Whether they need to gain new knowledge or learn how to perform a new task, this is when you do the teaching. Remember to break down the task, step by step, and try not to talk too fast. If you have been doing a particular activity for years and you know it inside out, you might find yourself explaining it very fast. The learner, though, is new to the information and needs to hear it more slowly. Furthermore, avoid using jargon, buzzwords, abbreviations or acronyms when describing processes or equipment; these special terms are familiar to you but not necessarily to the inexperienced employee.

Step 3: Have the Learner Perform the Operation or Repeat Back the Information

Once you have taught the trainee, ask them to teach it back to you. Whether it's a physical operation or a set of information, build in some practice time, encouraging the individual to explain what they're doing while they're doing it. Assure them that they may not get it perfectly the first time and that you'll be patient with them. Anything you can do to help people feel relaxed while learning will help make them faster, more confident learners.

Step 4: Evaluate Their Performance

After they have demonstrated what they have learned, give them specific feedback. If the person gets the hang of it the first time, a compliment is in order. But if the results are mixed, we strongly suggest you deliver the feedback this way: plus-minus-plus. Tell them what they have done well (plus), point out areas that could be improved (minus), and give them positive guidance on how to reach that improvement (plus). Let them know you have confidence in them and that you will be available for them as they continue to practice what they have learned.

Please keep in mind that even though there are four steps to this method, going through the entire process can take as little as ten or twenty minutes. The key is to devote as much time as necessary to each step, depending on the complexity of the material to be learned as well as the learner's prior experience with the task.

Above all, the important thing is not to show the other person how much you know, but to help them increase what they know. Keep the focus on them. That's what the best trainers do—even those who do "training on the fly."

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