

Training Pays Off

ALL THE HORSEPOWER in the world doesn't do any good unless you have competent, well-trained human power. This requires training.

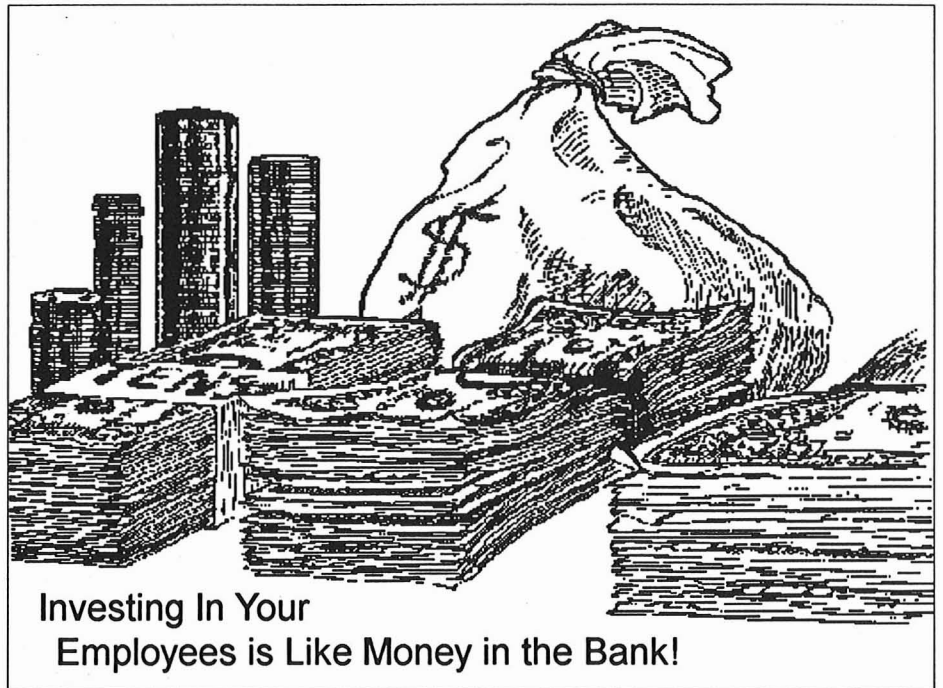
Training and education are not expenses, but investments. As in any investment, you want to get the best possible return. To do so, you need to know your workers. What are their strengths and weaknesses? Which of them have special talents? Can you make trainers out of them?

As you look at your crew's training needs, you also need to look at your attitude toward your employees. Are they doing the best job they know how to do? If not, the problem may be that they simply don't know any better. Most people do the best job they know how to do. The problem may be that they don't know what is expected, how what they do will be evaluated, or most importantly, why they are doing certain things in certain ways.

You need to provide each employee with a clear understanding of the policies and procedures under which they are expected to carry out their duties. At the same time, you need to encourage them to think for themselves within that framework. Encourage them to solve problems by using their heads, not just their hands. Don't punish creative thinking and innovation. If someone solves a problem by breaking a rule, you may need to make it clear that the solution was not acceptable as a general rule and they probably should not do it again. This is particularly true if the solution put your agency at risk in terms of potential liability claims. But don't penalize the person for trying.

Training sessions should be regular and timely. They need to become an expected part of the work routine. Sessions should be short and simple. Several brief sessions will probably be more productive than one longer session. Active people are not used to sitting around in meetings. Take one or two topics at a time and cover them thoroughly.

You may not be able to do all



training in-house. Consider investing in attending conferences such as the APWA International Public Works Congress and Equipment Show and the T² Center Workshops. Don't just send the supervisors. Choose people carefully and objectively to avoid the appearance of favoritism. Attending training programs should be a reward for people who have done outstanding work or have exceptional safety or attendance records. Always expect those who attend to provide some feedback for the rest of the crew.

Investing a few dollars in training will pay big dividends. It puts your employees on your side when you conduct in-house training. You will have someone in the audience that you can bring into the discussion. In fact, you should probably include these people by making them part of the instructional team.

You can make "somebodies" out of "nobodies." When you send people to conferences or training sessions, publicize it in your newsletter or bulletin boards and in local newspapers. People like to see their names in print when they have done something significant.

If attending outside training is out of the question, consider pooling your resources with those of a nearby agency and work together to accomplish your training goals. Encourage your personnel to meet with crews from other towns

or counties to compare notes and learn from each other.

Technology transfer doesn't necessarily involve "high tech" subjects. "Know-how transfer" may be a better way to define what we do. In its simplest form, it means if you know something that I don't know and you tell me or show me, technology has been transferred. The implementation is up to me. I must learn to use this new information to improve my operations.

The New Hampshire T² Center maintains a videotape library which will provide tapes for in-house training. The T² Center also provides several day-long workshops throughout the year.

Without qualified people to operate your equipment, it might just as well be sitting in the salvage yard. Your staff is your most valuable resource. People really do make the difference. Training does pay off!

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