

Training to Improve Performance

Planning for Needed Knowledge and Skills

Improving Performance

Organizations measure performance by the goods produced or services provided. It is the employees that produce the goods and provide the services. Therefore, performance depends on the application of the employees' knowledge and skills. This is true for all organizations, including highway agencies.

A highway department can improve its performance in two ways:

1. Enable greater application of existing knowledge and skills.
2. Improve the knowledge and skills of its people.

Recognizing good performance is an effective, yet inexpensive, way to get greater application. Necessary, but more expensive, is providing the materials and equipment necessary for efficient and effective application.

A municipality can improve the knowledge and skills of its people. This includes crew members, and also managers and others who make decisions about highway maintenance and repair. Highway maintenance is complex. New people have a lot to learn. Experienced people have to keep abreast of new technologies. Lifelong learning and training are the only paths to improve knowledge and skills.

To improve performance, municipalities must have a program to ensure its people are on the learning and training path. The following are steps to develop a learning program. It refers to learning approaches, which are described in the next article.

Developing a Learning Program

To improve its people's knowledge and skills, a highway department should have an education and training program. It can develop such a program with these steps:

1. Determine the results the department wants to achieve. The department's planned work will usually define these results.
2. Determine what knowledge and skills people

will need to achieve the results.

3. Design a training plan that enables individuals to acquire the needed

knowledge and skills. Managers should consider the learning approaches in the next article. They can then decide whether to use workshops of training providers, and internal training.

4. Arrange or deliver the training.
5. Design the follow-up and ways to reinforce the training.
6. Measure the impact and calculate return on your investment.

With a thorough training plan, a highway department will have people with the necessary knowledge and skills to achieve its results. In other words, the employees can produce more, and improve the performance of the department.

After any training, municipal management should reinforce the learning. Learners must apply it, or they will soon forget. Assigning learners with appropriate tasks is not only reinforcement, but also recognition of their self improvement.

Recognition reinforces learning, especially public recognition. Examples include:

- ◆ Public announcements of training activity completion, such as at department and public meetings, in newspapers, and in town reports.
- ◆ Prominent display of certificates and awards
- ◆ Official letters of recognition.

Public individual recognition also increases the prestige of the department and the municipality.

Source:
Kokkelenberg, Larry. "Nothing Fails Like Success," *Hot Mix Asphalt Technology*, July/August 2003.

A highway department can improve its performance by enabling greater application of existing knowledge and skills. And, improving the knowledge and skills of its people.