

# Staff training: think it through

By SIMON LIVINGSTONE

**A** POEM titled 'The Two Day Short Course' discusses how the rural industry has moved from a sector where training was informal, practical and delivered on the job, to a sector where formal training programs now abound.

The poem goes on to explain how there is no time for managers to operate their businesses any more, because they have no staff - everyone is away on training programs.

After all, there is a need for training in Cattlecare accreditation, risk management, quality assurance, chainsaw maintenance, chemical handling, computing, machinery operation, occupational health and safety, leadership and staff management, to mention a few. The views portrayed in the poem may seem extreme, but they do effectively illustrate how the rural sector has embraced the notion and philosophy of training. This direction is a positive move for the industry.

The 1990 Training Guarantee Act was intended to stimulate the start of a training culture in Australia. Its purpose was to encourage organisations to take responsibility for the training and development of employees. The vision was that, through training the workforce, Australia would continue to be internationally competitive.

However, the Act was suspended in 1994 and was regarded by many employers and employees as unsuccessful. It appeared inappropriate for all businesses to be required to spend a percentage of their payroll to training. Each business is different and has different training requirements for staff. Some employers held the view that it was not beneficial for businesses to train staff simply for the sake of appearing to do the right thing.

In more recent times, specific government assistance initiatives have made training programs more accessible and attractive to the rural industry.

**MAKE LINKS:** There are many advantages to be gained from training staff. But any training in which businesses involve staff needs to be well thought through. There should be a clear link between the company's goals and objectives.

Training should not be viewed as a separate function of the business, but rather as an integral part. But some businesses tend to conduct training as a reactionary component of their operation, virtually as an afterthought, used to fix a certain problem.

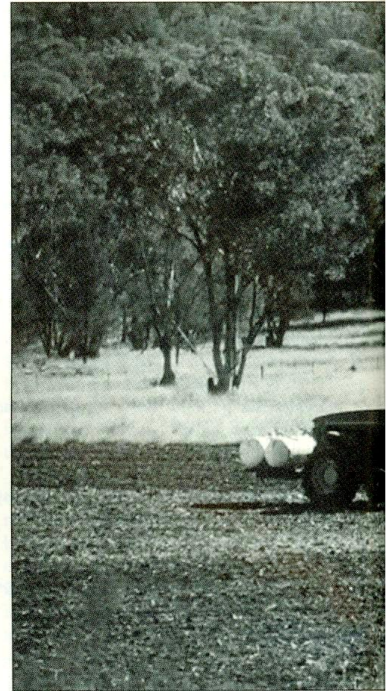
It is a responsibility of management to look for indicators that staff require training. For training to be worthwhile there needs to be a performance gap, meaning the job or jobs are not being carried out or performed to a desired standard.

Indicators often include production targets not being met or the quality of the work produced not being up to standard. For example, in an organisation which is experiencing high levels of staff turnover, this could be an indication that management requires training in supervisory skills.

Employers need to move away from the notion that whoever is available will attend the training program. What tends to happen in this scenario is that participants are not matched with the course content to be delivered, so an effective training result is not achieved.

For training to be effective, management must be supportive of the program and process. All staff at some stage will require training for them to continue to function at an effective performance level.

Employers recruiting and selecting staff will short list and employ those who possess the skills they require. But those chosen will require training further down the track as skills and conditions change. Quite often technology changes force employers to upgrade staff knowledge and skills so they can cope with new processes and techniques.



**CONSIDER BENEFITS:** Training provides management with a range of benefits to the business, including improving the quality and quantity of the work, possibly lowering the number of accidents in the workplace, and improving the morale and job satisfaction of those involved.

In many situations, training helps the business to become more efficient, allows the employees to develop personal skills and provides the opportunity for promotion. Training can also reduce the disruption caused by staff turnover.

The type of work completed may have an impact on how easy or difficult it is to assess the benefits from a particular training program. For the completion of relatively simple tasks, the benefits from training may be quite dramatic when the employee returns to the workplace. At managerial level it may take a while longer to see the benefits from training investment.

It is common nowadays for managers to find glossy training brochures coming across their desks, advertising places available in courses in a wide



variety of content areas. These courses often look and sound appealing. Many have a common denominator - they are expensive.

Sending staff away to attend training incurs costs for the business. Expenses include replacing the staff member for the duration of the course, as well as meeting travel, meal, accommodation and incidental expenses. In some situations, staff return to the workplace from the training course full of knowledge and enthusiasm, only to forget, or find they are not able to immediately apply, what they have learnt.

Employers are often quick to send staff away on training programs, often before they have assessed whether the training could be delivered by appropriate staff within the business.

The first step is for management to carry out an audit of the training needs of the organisation and then assess whether the training can effectively be conducted "in house".

Maybe managers feel they, or other staff, do not have the appropriate skills to deliver the training successfully. But

in many situations training could be carried out successfully by the business without having to incur costs of sending staff to formal training programs.

**ON THE JOB:** While most people associate training with formal courses, training is occurring in the workplace all the time, even when the business does not want to officially allocate time and money to the process. This form of training provides relevant 'hands on' experience to the employee and is often delivered by a supervisor. One of the main benefits of this form of training is that the employee is productive while learning takes place.

But quite often on-the-job training is poorly delivered because the supervisor lacks training skills, there is a lack of structure, and insufficient thought has gone into the content and delivery.

In many situations someone in the workplace is singled out as a likely candidate and asked to train other staff. Management needs to remember that not all employees who are singled out as suitable trainers are going to be keen to impart their knowledge.

6 The goal of training is to achieve the organisation's objectives as well as meet the employee's personal goals. Often both organisational objectives and employees' goals can be met through the effective use of workplace trainers. 9

**YOUR TRAINERS:** It is very important that those chosen to deliver the training are provided with training themselves. For any training session to be effective, there is always a reliance on the teaching skills of the trainer.

Teaching skills include knowledge of content, preparation of instructional material, skills in time management, being genuinely interested in trainees, showing enthusiasm in the course and having a sense of humour.

Effective trainers also acknowledge the need to motivate the participants. One way of achieving this successfully is for the trainer to match the objectives of the training program with the objectives of the participant.

Those given the task of training others need to have an understanding of how people learn. Trainers need to understand that the only way the employees are going to learn is if they are ready to learn and are motivated. Trainers are likely to fail if they believe one training technique is suitable for all groups.

The goal of training is to achieve the organisation's objectives as well as meet the employee's personal goals. Often both organisational objectives and employees' goals can be met through the effective use of workplace trainers.

Many of Australia's most progressive businesses have found an attractive alternative to sending staff away to attend training courses. They have selected suitable staff within the businesses and are training the trainers. ❁

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