

Education Versus Training

By T.J. Schier

Many people don't understand the difference between education and training. Education is giving out information and communicating to your trainees. Training is about practice and building skills. Today's younger generation of employees wants to be trained, not educated.

Problem is, if we don't educate them before we train them, it could lead to problems. Think about how you learned to drive. You need knowledge of the laws and then the actual training of getting behind the wheel. Same can be said for learning about the birds and the bees--if the education part isn't done effectively, the training could lead to undesirable results!

Mark Flores, director of ops for Chuck E. Cheese's, uses the macaroni-and-cheese example to demonstrate the difference. We've all made mac & cheese plenty of times in our lives, but if we don't follow the instructions exactly, we might get macaroni soup, crunchy macaroni, or something else other than what we intended. So how do we deliver education and training to ensure consistency?

Manuals. Booooooooring! We do need documentation, but make it fun! Include tons of photos and minimal text so it's more of a comic strip look. People are more likely to remember what they see versus what they read, so retention of information is better. Additionally, it's easier to translate into other languages.

Videos. Better than reading for most employees, but they need to be short segments (3--5 minutes maximum) with tons of visual image changes. Our employees today are used to watching CNN with talking video, a crawler message along the bottom, and the weather forecast on the side--all while having four online chats with their friends. Long, drawn-out videos lose their attention quickly. Watch a segment and go practice what you learn. You can watch the next segment after that.

Online. Golden Corral, White Castle, Sea Island Shrimp House, Buffalo Wild Wings, and Chuck E. Cheese's are all using or testing e-learning. Since it is self-paced, it goes at the speed of the learner. Be careful: As we've seen with e-books, it's not too comfortable to read a book on a PC, so keep the text to a minimum. Review questions can be built in as a checkpoint for the learner to advance to the next section. Great way to replace video and print, but it's still not "training."

Tests. We all hate tests! To ensure consistency in tests, keep them simple and visual (use as many pictures as possible), and use multiple-choice, ordering, or true-false format to ensure consistency in grading. Most of our employees no longer take fill-in-the-blank or essay tests. Ensure they have the basics down. Do all your trainers actually grade tests the same way?

All the above forms of "training" are really just education, yet most managers think it's training. We didn't get our driver's license after reading the book, watching the video, and passing a test--we had to demonstrate our skills to the authorities before we received permission to drive. Education is the necessary evil that must come first, though.

Do we follow the same format with our employees? Many companies do not--we just memorize a bunch of useless information the guest cares little about and then we're ready. You need to be validated on the skills it takes to do the job and re-validated periodically in the future. Knowing the job and doing the job are two entirely different things--and the guest notices.

Skill Validation

Having the new employee demonstrate skills for a manager shows you two things: how good the trainer was, and that the employee can do the functions of the job. We all might think we have the same definition of "greet the guest" or "suggestive sell," but when we see our employees in action, we find it's all across the board. If we don't coach them through the skill, they will simply do what they see at other restaurants (which often isn't good). Conduct these validations every 90--180 days to keep standards top of mind.

People train people. Just because someone is a good employee doesn't mean they will be a good trainer. The proper tools to educate will help, but the payoff is in the trainer demonstrating, coaching, and validating the skill of a new employee. To illustrate this point to your team, ask your trainers to train you on how to tie your shoes or put on a shirt. Act like you know nothing about it. Point being, it's a simple task we can all do in our sleep--like ringing up orders or making burgers--but it's incredibly hard to train someone else how to do it.

Macaroni and cheese anyone?

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