



Cory Chinn has over ten years of experience in the education and training field. Starting as a public school teacher, he then moved into the government training sector focusing on homeland security and first responder training. Most recently, he joined PropertyBoss Solutions as the Training and Implementation Specialist. For more information about Cory or PropertyBoss Solutions, visit propertyboss.com or call Cory at 864.297.7661.

Maximize Training Dollars

Training and education are important in all industries, and property management is no different. The more you utilize technology in your business, the greater the leverage effect of properly educated and trained employees who can significantly contribute to an efficient and effective company. There are many ways to provide the needed training and education, and many times it is passed on from employer to employee. When deciding on an approach to get the most from your employees, there are many factors to consider, such as motivation, environment, time, and reward.

EDUCATING ADULTS

Since employees of property management companies are adults, the education and training that they must participate in should be geared towards adult learning principles. Adult learning is different than that of elementary and high school aged students in that motivation and consequences differ. Motivation usually revolves on job stability and promotion. Consequence is not receiving a failing grade, but may be termination. The American educator Malcolm Knowles developed six principles that describe adult learning:

- **Practicality** – Adults need to know the reason for learning something.
- **Experience** – Prior knowledge provides the basis for learning activities.
- **Self-Direction** – Adults need to be responsible for their decisions on education as well as in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.
- **Relevance** – Adults are most interested in learning subjects having immediate relevance to their work and/or personal lives.
- **Goal Based** – Adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented.
- **Motivation** – Adults respond better to internal versus external motivators.

So which of these principles play a part in property management training? Well, in actuality, all of them. “Why am I doing this?” “How will this help me be more productive?” “Will I get that raise I think

I deserve?” These questions are common among employees of all fields and levels. When deciding on how to approach the training needs of employees, the employer has to decide the best course of action.

WHO SHOULD CONDUCT THE TRAINING?

Most companies use a software management tool to increase production and develop a more organized approach to their business. To learn how to utilize their software tool effectively and efficiently, they must be properly trained by a subject matter expert (SME) or an accomplished performer (AP). A SME is someone who knows the particular tool, but may presently not be applying it in a practical, “real-world” situation. The AP on the other hand is the person who is using it every day. The AP may know how to utilize most or all of the functionality, but may be limited by their particular setup. An advantage to having one or a combination of these types of individuals as a participant or as the instructor is that you learn how to use the product effectively from the beginning.

Most software providers offer several types of training and educational options to allow the user to learn the tool in which they invested their time and money. To fully utilize the tool purchased, employees need full buy-in to these principles. All too often employers purchase a tool for their staff that they think will enhance productivity, but in reality there is no buy-in from the staff early on. Include them in the decision process and listen to their feedback on how that tool will be used. Part of the software purchase should be ample training for proper implementation. The training is usually conducted first by the software provider’s training staff in a train-the-trainer type format. The employee can then share their knowledge with the other staff. The advantage to such an approach is that you will have both the SME and the AP involved in all aspects of the training process.

To fully utilize a software product, training should be considered as part of the overall product itself. Many experienced property management employees come to a new business with prior software training and use. Because of their experiences, they can offer



insight into the pros and cons of a particular setup. When an employee new to the field starts in the office, their prior business experiences can also offer insight in the use of the particular software being considered. Once the product has been chosen, obtaining employee buy-in early increases their motivation and sense of practicality and relevance.

EDUCATION OR TRAINING

You bought the product, decided to have your employees properly educated, and are ready to implement the product. Do you need education or training? What is the difference? Education is formal schooling, and training is only hands-on, right? Wrong. To understand the difference between training and education, look at their needs and uses. To fully utilize training, the employee must be educated. To fully utilize educational opportunities, the employee must be committed to the learning process.

Education is the overall understanding of the topics presented, whereas training is assessed by what can be produced afterward. In other words, education is the understanding, and training is the doing. To fully utilize a software product, it is important to educate and then train. This does not mean they cannot be done during the same session. Showing how to enter information in a particular blank is good for a short period, but educating them why the blank is needed is just, if not more, important. As the Chinese proverb says, "Give a man a fish, feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, feed him for a lifetime." This holds true in software as well. If you are properly educated on the software supplemented with occasional training, you will be far more successful.

As industry changes, the need for new and updated education and training becomes more prevalent. With new developments in technology and tools to increase productivity, it becomes even more important to stay on the cutting edge. The provider should not only offer classroom, on-site or web-based training, but should also provide several forms of self-directed learning. This usually comes in the form of written documentation, short videos and job-aids. Job-aids can save time and provide a quick reference.

IMPLEMENTING TRAINING

When judging training opportunities, there are several

factors to consider. It should be consistent, engage the learner and be relevant to the work environment.

To ensure consistency, there should be some form of documentation. This should start with a standardized outline that informs the learner of the information that will be discussed and covered. The second part of documentation is some form of reference material. Although reference material is important, it is also imperative to make it visually appealing and not boring to the user by using pictures, graphs and screenshots throughout. Other ways to ensure consistency is delivery. Even with an outline, two different instructors can emphasize different aspects. To counter this, instructors should have a common approach and clarify important points with the trainee prior to the start of the session whenever possible.

One of the most challenging aspects instructors face is making the learning engaging and relevant to the learner. Within the modern realm of training, many companies have turned to online training. This is most effective in a one-on-one setting where the instructor and client formulate the specific approach and topics to be covered during the session to best meet their needs and accomplish the learner's goals. Because of the differences in procedures and setup of each company, understanding these differences ensure the relevance and effectiveness of the session. After each completed session, a summary of the covered material for quick review should be provided.

IN CLOSING

Focusing on training needs and an overall strategy early in the implementation process of a software solution can ease the transition as well as provide confidence for the individual user. It is best to incorporate all parties involved when deciding on the course of action so that there is complete buy-in, motivation and relevance to the system. Implementing a train-the-trainer position is an effective way to mitigate confusion and provide for a stable training program. It may also be advantageous to work towards having a complete training process for new and existing employees to stay current on needs and curriculum in regards to products and processes. Implementing these early will not only enhance efficiency, but promote a more successful and positive attitude within your company. 📚

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