TRAINING PROGRAM ENGAGES STAFF TO MEET TARGET GOALS

Learn how one company challenged their Operators to succeed

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Even a "leading consumer products company" has opportunities to improve internal operations through developing new training methodologies, challenging seasoned employees to lead, and increasing value by focusing on and meeting targeted goals.

INTRODUCTION

An established and respected Midwest consumer products distribution center faced a dilemma. Productivity among a seasoned-employee base of Supervisory Leads and Palletizer Operators was down almost 15 percent from the 60,000 cases per shift target goal they once achieved. Once successful second-generation training was no longer effective and the current training methodology and documentations was outdated.

This situation called for sweeping changes and time was of the essence.

Polytron was engaged to collaborate and assist in finding ways for the client to meet their operational goals for palletizing through the implementation of improved Palletizer training.

SITUATION

Polytron Technology Transfer and Training had developed second generation classroom-based content and provided Instructor Certification training for this customer in 2002. Initially this increased knowledge and efficiencies for a team facing a new system. Six years later, time, processes and procedures became obsolete, operational shortcuts became common, and equipment components were upgraded until existing training documentation and training needs no longer aligned or directly related to current Operator duties. Nor did the materials provide up-to-date guidance regarding new safety concerns.

In short, the training tools were no longer as effective as they once were.

Knowledge passed from Leads to Operators was not consistent among shifts and provided limited guidelines or feedback for fault recovery and troubleshooting. Over time, such inconsistencies gradually affected the teams ability to achieve their target goals.

The training lead was becoming increasingly frustrated by lengthy presentations that focused on technical adjustments and obsolete content. In addition, having no method of tracking Operator knowledge or confirming and reinforcing learning resulted in learning gaps that increased the likelihood of safety incidents during troubleshooting. Finally, the glaring lack of activities to keep trainees engaged made training routine and monotonous.

The Training Lead believed that, over time, targeted training would reduce the number of incidents by 5 percent.

CHALLENGE

The high level challenge was time. Training was timed to support the Operators hired each period. In this case, new hire and refresher training was scheduled for use less than four months from project start. This meant that in fewer than 16 weeks, solutions had to be not only identified but also implemented. Time was limited and strictly managed, but producing a viable and effective client approved training program was crucial.

Safety, Start-up and Shutdown, Specific Fault Recovery and Effective Troubleshooting were identified as primary objectives. A site-visit at project start was imperative in determining pertinent content and applying that content to the training objectives.

An additional hurdle included creating learning activities that would not only engage the trainees, but also enhance training and knowledge retention. This required extensive interviews with the Leads to determine product and line opportunities, as well as obtaining data for older equipment. Finally, providing a method to easily track certification, and deciding on a platform that would successfully house all training and administration documents required interfacing with both the client's I.T. department and Human Resources to determine access and accountability requirements.

Observations confirmed that each Lead had a unique style for interacting with the Operators. While inconsistencies were resulting in Operator frustration and limited learning, they were also creating a tribal knowledge base not shared between teams.

Meeting these challenges required creativity and an ability to think outside the box.

SOLUTION

Within 12 weeks, Polytron developed a company and client branded site specific web-based program management tool that organized everything needed to plan, train, assess, certify, track and report in-house training activities. Features included a Web interface with easy navigation links to training plans, presentations, class materials, and ancillary tools, such as tracking, assessing & annual certification forms, and "how to" guide for program success.

Also available at the trainer's fingertips, a portable training lock-box, including a CD of all training content, folders for all Trainer and Student Materials, Activities, Tracking forms, and print-ready for a class of eight Operators. Essential Daily Training Plans and Course Presentation slides with instructional class flow notes provided the foundation for the Training Program. Instructor guides included answer keys, presentation tips, and appropriate questions as well as checklists, activities, assessments, independent learning, and job aid placement to help the Trainer lead the class. Each course contained content tailored to meet the training goals and each associated activity or independent learning aid was targeted to improve safety, fault recovery, or troubleshooting skills.

Supervisory Leads as well as the Lead Trainer participated in a half-day mentoring program (M.E.N.T.O.R.^{SM}) designed to teach both mentoring skills and a process to follow when coaching employees. The program included classroom and hands-on application using the new training job aids, and observation feedback.

BENEFITS

Feedback specific to the web-based program management tool has been positive. Fingertip ready standardized training courses with daily training plans, presentations, handouts, activities, checklists and assessments has enhanced new employee training and established just-in-time training.

The transition from information overload during training to concise, user-oriented training has been a positive one for the Training Lead, the Leads and the Operators. Prior concerns regarding overwhelming, obsolete, training content were banished due to edited, succinct presentations, and activities that reiterate knowledge gathered during training and focus on meeting target goals.

Following the M.E.N.T.O.R.^{SM} process not only improved knowledge transfer to the Operators but created open discussion between Leads on how to improve best practices.

CONCLUSION

Giving the ability to track trainee progress and evaluate over the course of 30, 60, and 90-days has resulted in operator engagement and interaction during class, just-in-time mentoring following class, and an almost 10 percent improvement in target goals.

"…this program is delivering what we we're looking for… we are right on track…"

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