A wise woman once advised me, “One trains their dog, but educates a person.” So, how does your company look at their training or education programs? There is subtle difference between the two words. When training workers, the goal is to ensure that the trainee understands a task or job and can repeat what he or she is taught. Education seeks not just to teach them to do a task or tasks but to understand how and why it is being done. As an example, the person or persons assigned to monitor a critical control point (CCP) should be educated to understand not only how to monitor the CCP, but why it is important and what they should do if the established limits are not met. Having someone perform this task as if they are a robot is really not advisable.

Management Support

The first step toward developing and implementing a program to ensure the workforce is educated or trained to carry out the many different tasks required to properly operate a food processing facility is management support. Ensuring that your workforce is properly educated will entail a commitment of time, effort, some money, and patience. Training does not get done overnight. However, the benefits will far outweigh what has been committed to the program. Training must be conducted in the following areas: food safety, sanitation, good manufacturing practices (GMPs), procedures, work instructions, worker safety, and other areas as needed.

Training in the area of worker safety is absolutely essential to protect the workers and to minimize potential liability. Among the areas that should be addressed during safety training are slips and falls, proper lifting, lock-out tag-out, safe chemical handling, right-to-know, and others.

Liability is something of which processors must be cognizant. Years ago, a processor was taken to court by a worker who had been injured on the job. The person had gotten caustic in his eyes and was suing the company for negligence. Ironically, the individual had attended a worker safety meeting just prior to being injured. The injury occurred because the person had not worn any eye protection. When the case went to court, there were several workers who testified that the injured party had been at a safety meeting just before the accident. However, he had failed to sign the attendance sheet, so there was no evidence that he had actually attended the program. Without the documentation, the judge ruled that the company had failed to properly train their workers and was, therefore, negligent and they ended up paying a significant fine. The message being, “Processors must not only educate their workers, they must be sure that the sessions are documented.”

The Basis of Education

Before a food processor can begin educating or training their work force, there must be something that they can train against. The basis for all education is the procedures developed and written by the company and/or their vendors. These include general protocols and work instructions, and should include all aspects of sanitation, quality, production, and food safety. Never rely on “word of mouth” to get a message across. Every time a message is delivered verbally, there is a chance that it will be changed. Think of the old party game in which a message is passed around the table in a whisper. By the time it reaches the last person, it is usually horribly corrupted. In many operations, especially any that include handling chemicals, the protocol must address safe handling of the chemicals which includes the personal protective equipment (PPE) required for the work. To ensure that it is absolutely clear as to what is required, many companies utilize icons in their procedures (Fig. 1).

Delivering the Message

How the message is delivered to workers makes all the difference. With adult learners, who make up the whole of the work force, an effort must be made to ensure that the sessions are applicable to their job, focused, and interactive. Asking a person to read something or simply lecturing is not the most effective way to educate your workers. As may be seen in Dale’s Cone of Experience (Fig. 2), the more effort that is made to get people involved and to make the sessions visual, the greater the

People Generally Remember:

- 10% of what they read
- 20% of what they hear
- 30% of what they see
- 50% of what they hear and see
- 70% of what they say or write
- 90% of what they say as they DO something

Fig. 2. Dale’s Cone of Experience (1).
chance that the lessons will stay in their minds. And, that is the key, ensuring that they understand and remember what is being taught. As an example, providing a line operator in training with a procedure to read will be much less effective than having the operator work with an experienced person. Some operations take this a step further. The trainee will work side-by-side with the experienced person and both the trainer and trainee will initial/ sign and date each step in the procedure or work instruction when both persons feel that the trainee has mastered that part of the process. This is a slower process, but helps to ensure that the trainee truly understands what he is doing. In addition, the signed and dated protocol provides excellent documentation that the work was done and effective.

It is also important to think about who is delivering the message. Some operations include an in-house trainer or educator. This person should understand what he or she is teaching and be able to deliver the message, or in other words, be able to “connect” with the students. Many will send their educators to a “train-the-trainer” session, which provides instructors with the tools to be an educator. This is not mandatory, however. It is also a good idea to look to your vendors for assistance in training and education. Equipment and chemical suppliers know their products and are usually very effective at delivering the message.

And, finally, the programs need to take into account what language(s) is spoken by the workers. In the United States’ food industry, there is a large Hispanic workforce, so many operations need to have trainers who can teach in one or more languages.

It also helps to have a venue to conduct sessions. The training room should be quiet, accessible to all employees, and have sufficient room so the staff can sit and listen comfortably. Ideally, the venue should also be fitted with screens and the necessary equipment to project slides or videos. And, as noted earlier, there should also be adequate space to conduct demonstrations or hands-on sessions. Remember, the more interactive the program, the more people will remember what was discussed.

**Documenting the Work**

The importance of documenting all training or education sessions was alluded to earlier in the article. Ideally, companies should be able to not only document what is done, but be able to access those records easily. Many companies maintain training records as hard copies. These may be sign-up sheets, certificates or other records. In some cases, human resources or a training coordinator will transfer records to each individual’s personnel file. This is a better way to keep records than piles of sign-up sheets simply because it allows the company to identify gaps in a person’s background. Along these same lines, it is also a good idea to ensure that each job description includes all required programs for that position.

What more and more companies are doing is moving to a computerized “Training Tracker.” These can be developed in-house using programs such as ACCESS or EXCEL, or they can look elsewhere for programs specifically designed to track training. Training tracker programs should have the following features: enter training results; determine gaps; sort by person, program, and operational area; access to training materials and sign-up sheets; flags if something is missed; and links to requirements for each job position.

The ability to flag a gap is extremely important, especially when it comes to a potential liability issue. For example, if a worker was on holiday or out with an illness when a worker safety program was conducted, the program should have the ability to flag the gap in the worker’s record and remind people that he or she needs that program.

**Summary**

Training or education is the foundation for good quality, safety, and sanitation operations. Processors must make a commitment to ensuring that all members of their work force, including temporary workers, receive basic training or education in areas such as food safety, basic sanitation, worker hygiene, and the task or tasks they are supposed to be doing. The training should be conducted by people who have the ability to deliver the message clearly and concisely, and it is imperative that the sessions be documented.

**Reference**


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