

Why Invest in Training?

In Part, to Help With the Labor Shortage

by Kaydeen Laird

Among the many trends impacting the fenestration industry, the shortage of skilled labor continues to top the list. Combine that with rapid technological change and the need for employee training is more imperative than ever—especially as a means for improving retention and performance. It isn't only about new hires. Incoming employees need to be brought up to speed, but as workplace technologies and processes evolve, a lack of ongoing training leaves once-skilled workers at risk for lagging behind.

When it comes to retention and quality, employees who adapt to a humdrum approach in their daily function have a limited context for the importance of their work and are therefore less likely to be personally invested. As a result, training can help to encourage stability.

The good news is, when developing your company's training programs, you don't have to start from scratch in every area, because a wealth of subject matter exists. Chief among them are guidelines for safety (mandated by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration) and quality inspections (required for product certification). There are also others that provide essential benefits. Even with those resources, however, training can sometimes be deprioritized in lieu of day-to-day operations. A look at the benefits suggests that this shouldn't be the case.

The best regimes for training produce:

- **Better adherence to quality standards:** Well-trained employees are more likely to produce higher-quality output the first time, thereby reducing rework. Staying current on industry standards and their implications for the product and/or manufacturing processes also results in better products;
- **Improved management with more predictable outcomes:** Effective training brings all employees to a higher skill level, so they all have similar abilities and awareness for expectations and procedures within the company and industry;
- **Increased job satisfaction and morale:** Employees who feel appreciated and challenged, partly through training opportunities, tend to have greater job satisfaction and are more motivated, also investing greater pride into their work;
- **Increased retention among employees:** Those who receive training are more likely to remain, reducing turn-

over and company exposure to the sparsely qualified labor market;

- **Increased productivity:** In addition to greater process knowledge, effective training that advances career credentials helps to build loyalty, increases personal engagement and enhances productivity; and
- **Enhanced innovation:** Training increases the capacity to adopt new technologies and methods, which can encourage creativity, thereby stimulating innovation in products and strategies.

But What About the Costs?

The bottom line is: Training doesn't have to be expensive. Often, in-house subject matter experts can be leveraged without the need for expensive outside support. Training sessions, which can be created as online programs, can involve longer-term employees who share their knowledge and experience. Informal "lunch and learn" sessions can introduce more learning at minimal cost and with less time away from work.

Resources also exist within the industry. For example, AAMA offers AIA-accredited continuing education, as well as frequent webinars on various topics of interest to the industry.

There is also the comprehensive FenestrationMasters (FM) training and credentialing program, which is arguably the industry standard for comprehensive education, providing extensive guidance on things like industry standards, product and material types, and code requirements. Launched in 2012, the FM program has graduated more than 220 individuals, including those at the introductory level, which is especially helpful for newcomers to the industry. Watch for the updated FM version 2.0, which is coming soon.

The bottom line is: A better-trained workforce is likely to be more stable and more profitable than a lesser-trained one. As Derek Bok, president of Harvard University, once said: "If you think training is expensive, try ignorance." [DWM]



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