

More Than Just Ride & Guide: The Nuts and Bolts of Training

by Craig Schraad

Staffing can be one of your biggest challenges yet it often receives the least amount of attention. A bad hire can frustrate you to your limit when it does not work out and the cost of having an employee not succeed is twice the cost that you paid out in salary for them. According to a report from Glassdoor Economic Research, the average hiring process in the U.S. takes twenty-three days and according to an article from LinkedIn, the average time to hire is thirty days. It's important to build a game plan for successful implementation after the hire.

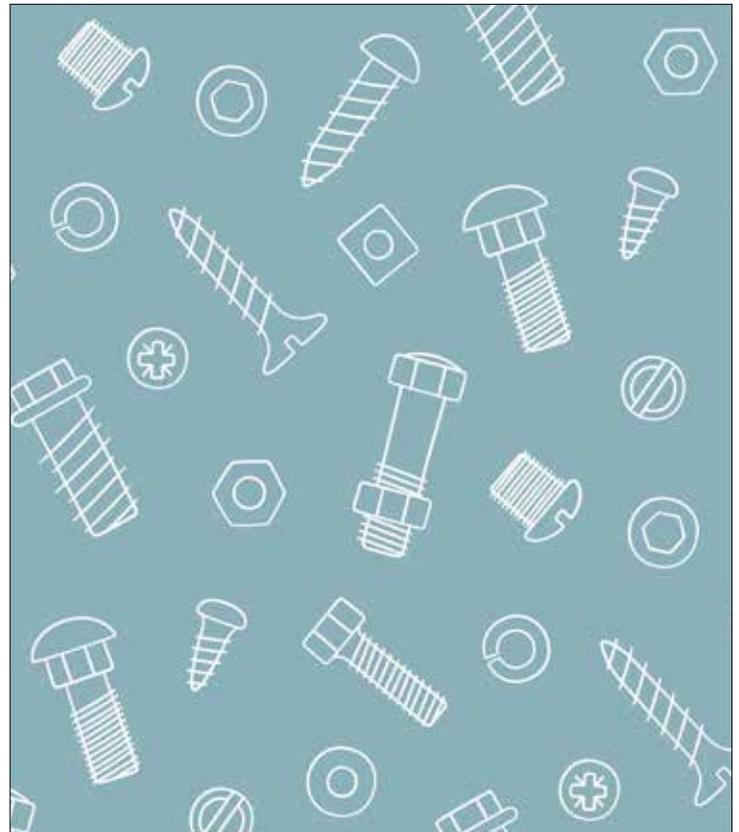
So you have just gone through the exhaustive work of recruiting, interviewing, and closing the deal on bringing a new, talented employee on board. The issue is that the person is green and not familiar with our unique industry. The solution typically is a "ride and guide." Hang out with a senior tech while they show you the ropes. But, is there a better approach?

Instead, let's take the new person down a structured path of introducing them to the industry and training them the way that you want your employee to be developed. This path identifies the skillset needed and the training media available to transfer the knowledge and the approach. Let's take a look at the structured approach.

Alex, just graduated, decided to start a career in the fire protection industry. Alex has friends that work at the company (which is a great way to acquire talent). Your company is a full-service fire protection organization that provides service in multiple disciplines including fire alarm, fire suppression, fire sprinkler, fire extinguishers, and kitchen hood fire suppression. Now it is time to train Alex: where do we begin? In the past we would have teamed Alex with another service person in the discipline that needs the most help, but today we do different. We will train Alex the way that Alex deserves to be trained in order to succeed.

Let's think about what Alex will need to know.

- What department will Alex be working in? What tools are needed?
- Will Alex eventually be working as a team or individually?
- Is Alex performing new installation or service work?
- Is Alex familiar with the industry jargon?
- What industry code training is needed?
- Business processes:
 - How will work orders be dispatched?
 - How are work orders completed?
- Safety training
- Company HR processes
- Life skills training:
 - Time management



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- Route efficiency: How do you decide where to go?
- Customer interaction

These are all relevant items that a reasonable tech will pick up over time. However, what if you only had one week to train Alex and get them producing? Would you take a different approach? Would you train them yourself? Do you have the time? Would you pull your best tech away from their work to train the new tech? Would you utilize existing written and video resources? It seems that once we have a

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timeline people become more productive, including business owners!

Let's turn our attention back to Alex. For the sake of creating a story, Alex was hired to join the kitchen hood suppression team. Remember we have one week to get Alex productive at suppression system inspections. Also remember, this exercise is to focus on an efficient training plan and bypasses the obvious that Alex will need to be certified before performing inspections on their own. In addition, it would be impossible to train a new tech to be productive in a week. That being said, let's play the game anyway.

The one-week plan to a productive Alex—where do we start?

Since it is very inefficient to train a person on every single thing that they will encounter in the next five years, let's focus on training one system at a time to let them build confidence. Using the 80/20 principal, how would you train Alex on the most popular system that you service? Depending on the company's product line, most of your systems will comprise of a very common system, therefore, our training will focus on this one system. Keep in mind that not everyone learns that same way. Some are linear thinkers and others need to see the big picture first.

Step 1 – Break the training into categories.

- Terminology and system design
- Technical training on how a suppression system works
- Business processes for inspection forms and internal work orders
- Interpersonal training on how to talk to customers or customer service training

Step 2 – Identify resources for each of these categories.

- Terminology and system design
 - Anatomy of the system design
 - Appliance specific design
 - Overlapping appliance protection
- Technical training on how a suppression system works
 - There are a wide variety of sources on how the system works
 - FED Learning Center – structured training
 - This type of hands-on training provided by people who train regularly is a very effective approach. The money spent may be well worth the professionalism that it offers.
 - YouTube videos
 - It is free and effective, but remember sometimes you get what you pay for.
 - Manufacturer websites
 - Equipment data sheets and product manuals are excellent training materials. This much information will be difficult to navigate and digest.
 - Pre-recorded company videos – if you want your company to standardize a consistent approach, a technical video will provide consistency. Making them interesting is the challenge.
 - NFPA 17A. Set up an account for new employees so that they have online access to the codes that drive their industry.
 - The current manufacturer's product manual is the key to all

knowledge

- How to disarm a system
 - Live equipment is probably the best training method on disarming a system. Some functions, you just have to lay hands on.
- What is included in the testing of a system
 - The current manufacturer's product manual offers a step-by-step process to test and inspect a system.
- How to verify if the system is installed per manufacturer's design criteria
 - This will require a detailed look into the manufacturer's product manual.
 - While you are in the details of the manual, do yourself a favor and make a quick guide or cheat sheet for quick reference.
- Business processes
 - Develop an office software manual and flow charts on how your system operates. If you can't flow chart your operations, trust when I say no new employee will understand your process either.
- Customer service training
 - There are dozens of companies wanting to sell their platform and some are really good.
 - Another approach is to make a list of questions and scenarios that the tech will encounter and review these topics often.

What other resources are available for training?

- Trade organizations such as NAFED and the FED Learning Center training platform
- YouTube videos, Joe Klochan for example
- Manufacturer websites
- Pre-recorded company videos

As the tech progresses, other categories that are very helpful include:

- Time management
- Routing efficiency
- How to grow the ticket

There is a lot of ground to cover, so having a game plan is the best chance for success. Document the process and make revisions as you go.

Sample Training Schedule

So here is what the first week for Alex, our new kitchen hood suppression technician, could look like.

Day One

- Introduction to the office staff and company software.
- Walk through the business process manual explaining how to access your software and how to operate the software.
- Have practice equipment set up for testing and resetting one brand



of kitchen hood suppression system. Practice until Alex can perform the inspection without help. This includes completing the paperwork.

- Introduction to the manufacturer's product manual.
 - How to perform an inspection
 - Nozzle and detection placement and coverage.

Day Two

- Review of the business software and practice inspections.
- Practice on the second most-used system brand.
- Cover the code guidelines of NPFA 17A.
- Cover NFPA 10 and fire extinguisher maintenance.
- Review the business software and practice inspections.

Day Three

- Review of the business software and practice inspections.
- Roleplay the opening conversation with the customer.
- In detail, explain the technique of how to efficiently do an inspection. For example:
 - Put links in your shirt pocket before you get on the ladder.
 - Find a system to carry the correct tools with you into the hood.
 - How to identify clogged pipe and what you do about it.
 - What is the impact of broken filters?
- Discuss how to stand on a grill without burning yourself nor irritating the cook.
- Discuss how to talk to the customer when the system needs corrections.
- Coach to importance of managing a service route and when to test a fast food facility vs. a community center.

Day Four

- It is time for the "ride and guide." After spending those first three days in office, we will know which tech is the best fit for Alex to learn from.
- Ultimately, we want to have Alex out with multiple experienced technicians so that Alex can witness the process from various angles.

Day Five

- More ride and guide.
- Today Alex will do the inspections and a senior tech will observe.
- End of week recap with management.

This training process may eat up an entire week of your time, but having a properly trained technician may also free up a month of your future time. A good coach will focus on the mindset of people entering the team and rely on the maturity of the well-trained team to carry them to a win. Start training properly from this point forward. When it comes to employees, we all have fires to put out—let's put them out at the incipient stage. ■

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