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# Effective Skills Development Programs

Keys to attracting and keeping the best people

## White Paper

### Executive Summary

The difference between companies with an engaged and stable workforce against those with a revolving door can be something as basic as effective skills development. People who feel valued by their company, and see that value manifest as a willingness to help them improve their skills and knowledge, generally return the favor in the form of loyalty and dedication. Siemens can help manufacturers evaluate their workforce and design programs to improve strengths and reinforce weaknesses. Using a variety of training techniques, it is possible to develop people in a cost-effective way that is rewarding for all involved.

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### Is your HR department keeping up with your company's need for skilled people in your manufacturing operations?

If you feel you're holding your own, you're better off than many companies. In study after study, finding and keeping the right people with the right skills ranks among the highest challenges for manufacturers. Major demographic shifts or population patterns in your immediate area can't be changed, but the motivation level of your employees, either positive or negative, and job satisfaction are major elements of the mix that can be influenced. Effective training plays an important role in profitable companies improving and leveraging employee satisfaction.



Workers who feel they are good at their job have cleared a major hurdle toward the goal of overall job satisfaction. There are other issues that also have to be addressed such as compensation and personal relationships, but those other things won't help if an individual in your plant is struggling every day just to keep up. The opposite is also true; the most qualified people may become dissatisfied if they don't think they have opportunities to advance. Let's look at two examples:

Marge is a lead on your bottling line. She's good at her job and likes the company except when she has to do a setup for a different bottle size. Making adjustments to the controller scare her because she doesn't understand the programming and she had a very bad experience that cost several hours of production. Every time she has to do a setup change, her anxiety level climbs 20 points. She's even looked around for another job where she won't have to face such stress.

Bob works in your assembly department. He is clearly the best in that group and has to do the most sophisticated setups. He feels wasted and underpaid there and wants

to work as a programmer, but he realizes he needs a little more skill to get the necessary proficiency. He's also looking around for a company that will give him that kind of opportunity.

Here's a third situation: Six months ago your company spent \$15 million dollars on a new packaging line. The system integrator that built it did a great job, but the technicians who set it up are still working in the plant. They should have been long gone by now, but your people can't seem to grasp what's necessary to make it work the way it should. It's not the integrator's fault; it's your internal skill level.

### How do you approach these problems?

There are two situations where people are struggling with job satisfaction because of a lack of training. Marge because she's barely holding on, and Bob because he feels he could do more. There are probably dozens of similar scenarios. You also have the problem of overall skill level in various parts of the plant. The common denominator to all scenarios is training. Effective training helps improve skills where gaps exist, and it helps make your good people even better.

### Solution for Dissatisfied Performers is often Opportunity

Marge and Bob's situations can become an advantage or liability, depending on the company's response. Some dissatisfaction is healthy, which in this context means people who want to advance to the next skill level and they aren't happy until they're doing more. They know they won't be handed advancement as a gift, so they're willing to work for it. They see the career ladder and want resources to climb it. Bob is already in that position, and Marge could be too with a little encouragement.

As a manufacturer, one of the best things you can hope for is a staff made up of conscientious people who are concerned about performing well, always striving for more, feeling appreciated by the company, and seeing opportunities to advance. The company looks at every individual, understands what is required for correct performance of each job function, and makes sure the individual has the skills necessary to perform his or her job well. Such people are motivated and productive. How do you make that happen?

Answer: **Effective skills development programs.**

Technical skills development can mean many things and identifying the company's needs is essential to a successful solution. There are several factors at work:

- **Assessment of existing skills, knowledge, and training needs:** What do we need our employees to be able to do against what can they do? Is there a gap?
- **Individual learning paths:** How do people learn? What is an effective way to teach a specific skill? If you consider all the skills you have learned in your lifetime, how did you learn them? In a classroom? Watching others? Trial and error? How do you need to teach the skills your people need to learn?
- **Variety of learning methods fitted to individual's needs:** Moving beyond the classroom, what resources do we have and what do we need?
- **Customized aftercare to ensure knowledge is retained** and always up to date: Maintain your skills over the long haul.

### Success factors for both sides

Traits of a successful organization emerge when analyzing both the company's and employee's perspectives. Ongoing attention to these practices in training and in day-to-day manufacturing helps ensure a successful and sustainable relationship for the long term.

For the company:

- **Transparency about necessary skills:** Be clear with your people about what you need from them.
- **Align competencies to business targets and situation:** What skills do you really need to keep your plant running? A highly skilled PLC programmer probably can't weld. If you need a welder, that programmer won't help you.
- **Sustainable skill development:** Training is not an event. It may consist of events, but any effort has to be sustained over time. Attending a class once does not train a person forever.

For employees:

- **Transparency about necessary skills:** The better I understand my job, the better I understand what is necessary to do it well and how it fits into the larger picture.
- **Awareness of one's own competence level and the opportunity for improvement:** Where do I fit in? Am I really good at what I do, or so-so? I need honest and objective answers along with ways to get better.

### Skills Development as a Productive Experience for Everyone

To many plant managers, the training experience has not been positive: it brings up thoughts of sending critical production staff off to an expensive and remote location where they will be crammed full of technical knowledge over several days, little of which will survive the trip home. While they're gone the plant will struggle to keep up and the overtime budget will go through the roof. Fortunately, reality does not have to be that way.

A successful skills development program begins by reviewing your company needs: How do you see the skills level of your people now, and where do they need to be to fulfill your manufacturing objectives? That discussion will involve your manufacturing and HR management since everyone has to agree on the need and solution if it is going to work in the long term.

Note that those two elements focus on your company: Where you are now and where you think you need to be. You don't need someone to come in and tell you what skills you should have. The process needs to begin with an assessment of your people based on your performance standards. A complimentary training solution assists you in establishing those standards and providing the tools to perform the evaluation. Once you identify where the skills gaps are, the next step is to design a technical skills development cycle that stresses continuous learning.

Successful programs involve a mix of approaches to fit the situation:

- **Classroom training** - Instructor-led classroom learning can help advance large groups together. It can be at your facility or one of our centers, so travel can generally be avoided.
- **Virtual classroom** – Virtual instructor-led learning using a live teacher with students signing on from anywhere offers intensive training but with a higher level of convenience.
- **Learn at your own pace** – Self-paced learning using classic e-learning modules, with students individually or in small groups, allows them to move at their own pace. There are more than 500 titles in our library.
- **Rapid video refreshers** – Pulling up the how-to video library provides short lessons designed to refresh earlier training.
- **More effective OJT** – On-the-job learning can be most effective when you understand what specific things people need to learn and what person is best to do the teaching.
- **"Dial-a-Mentor"** –Virtual mentoring provides access to our expert via video chat, email or phone call.

Keep in mind the importance of on-demand and follow-up aspects of learning. Skills that are not used constantly can atrophy and need to be refreshed. That reality becomes the undoing of many programs because companies think training is an event. Intensive training over a short period of time can work, and it can raise skill levels, but without aftercare, it will decline. Some companies see this as a failure when it is simply human nature and there are ways to accommodate it.

Siemens is dedicated to providing technical learning services tailored to your specific needs that are effective and cost-effective. Any training program that does not generate a payoff well beyond its cost in the form of more effective and productive employees is doomed to fail. Siemens can deliver success that you will see in the form of better and more skilled employees, higher employee retention and greater profitability through lower manufacturing costs. We're focused on your success and want to deliver more ways to learn more effectively.

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