

Refuse To Be an Average Company

A Business Owner's Guide to Contractor Education

*By John Zink, Director of Education and Programs
Educational Foundation, Plumbing-Heating-Cooling Contractors—National Association*

The success of a business can often be traced to the owner's dedication to continuing education and encouraging their employees to constantly learn new skills. When considering the idea of educational programs for yourself and your employees, keep these thoughts in mind:

Recognize the Massive Benefits of Training.

More repeat sales, better customer satisfaction, higher profits and fewer callbacks.

A tech who mumbles through the explanation of what's wrong with the furnace and leaves a mess for the homeowner to clean up will not get the next service call. The tech who has been through a customer relations seminar and proper service training can explain the problem in clear terms, fix it right the first time and probably sell a maintenance agreement along the way. If the customer has confidence in the tech, they are also less likely to blame unrelated problems on the tech's work, resulting in fewer callbacks. Long term, a company with properly trained techs will gain loyal repeat customers, while their competitors with untrained employees will have to rely on charging the lowest price.

Better employee retention, higher company morale and easier hiring.

Employees are customers as well, and most want an employer who can offer the best overall value. Quality employees know that a company that offers training will help them gain skills and make them more valuable for the rest of their career. Owners should work to make their shop the only one in town with the positive reputation of investing in its employees through regular training opportunities. You will have the best people in town knocking on your door looking for a job.

Make the Time to Attend Educational Programs.

Training can help even out workload peaks and valleys.

When work is busy and things are happening fast, the idea of stopping everything to spend time in a seminar seems crazy. When times are lean, contractors say that they are busier than ever just trying to find enough work to keep the guys busy. Typically the work they are taking is lower quality, higher risk, with lower profits, outside of their preferred work area, for clients that are harder to work with.

Training needs to happen throughout the year, in good times and bad, so techs are continuously focused on improvement. This focus will let you field a team of highly trained and professional techs that will help the company build a solid base of repeat customers. These loyal customers will feed the company a steady stream of business and allow you to become more selective about the work the company takes on. Lose the low profit, high risk work and you may be able to double your profit margin with 25 percent less volume.

There will never be the perfect time to get away for a seminar.

Owners need to attend educational programs, too. Company culture starts at the top, and owners are responsible for setting the attitude that education is important.

Recognize that there will never seem to be a good time to stop everything and attend a seminar. Accept that it's a planning and discipline issue, and commit to attending educational events on a regular basis.

Benefits of Education Can Depend How it's Delivered.

In-Person Seminars May be Your Best Bet

Books and video programs offer great training flexibility, but at a cost. The book or video that is there whenever you are ready for it may never make it off the shelf. Without the element of a deadline, human nature too easily allows us put off using this learning opportunity forever.

In-person seminars and training courses are inherently "use it or lose it" educational opportunities. Put it off and you will miss out. Find an event you want to attend and pay the registration fee early—a few months in advance if possible. Consider this block of time as untouchable. The registration fee you have already paid will give you a solid way to fend off potential schedule conflicts.

When choosing seminars to attend, keep an eye out for speaker names you see often. If they are in demand, it is usually because they do the best job of teaching. If possible, attend one of the instructor's sessions yourself before sending your employees.

Look for instructors who ask the audience questions at the beginning of their sessions. These instructors are learning about the skill and experience level of the attendees so they can adapt their presentation to fit.

Keep in mind that the best seminars combine instruction from the speaker with hands-on exercises that reinforce learning. Even better are sessions that get attendees working on exercises in groups. This forces attendees to talk and network with others in the class. Active association members regularly say that networking opportunities are the most powerful benefit of membership. Remember that a five-minute conversation with someone in a seminar could help you or your employees find solutions to problems that have plagued your company for years.

It's all About Opportunities.

Refuse to be an Average Company.

By participating in educational programs and training, you are giving yourself, your employees and your company opportunities to gain knowledge that will help save time, money and headaches. Depriving your company of these opportunities ensures that it will never be better than average. Something that you have invested your life's work to build deserves every opportunity to become phenomenally successful.

The PHCC Educational Foundation provides business management training for p-h-c contractors and their employees. John Zink can be reached at zink@naphcc.org or (800) 533-7694. You can read more about this subject online at:

<http://www.foundation.phccweb.org>

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