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## **Continued professional development is key to company success - by Laura Eldredge**

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The Construction Institute

Developing your company's most important asset

Whether your company size is 2 or 2,000, employees are your most valuable resource. Investing in their training and development will help your company grow and succeed. From office personnel to project managers and estimators to engineers; balancing the training needs of your team can be daunting. It's a task that is increasingly important, and shouldn't be overlooked.

Years ago, more time and energy was put into having senior staff mentor younger, newer employees. With a fast moving industry and fewer resources, seasoned professionals have limited time to devote to this effort. Companies need to make it a priority to provide adequate training and development for all staff. If they do not, it will be detrimental to their business and the industry as a whole. Companies who make employee development an integral part of their overall culture will strengthen and grow their organization through their employees' success.

F+F Mechanical Enterprises, Inc., a full-service mechanical contractor in North Haven, has a varied team of office, fabrication shop, and field staff. They have two individuals tasked with managing training opportunities for their multi-faceted team. When deciding on what training is needed, Joe Ferrucci, vice president at F+F Mechanical said, "If anyone has an idea on training they require, they can submit that request. We also regularly brainstorm on ideas for training, and will have various employees attend 1-3 trainings per month on average." Training options can be internal, such as foreman training junior foreman on the use of iPads, to training provided by vendors or educational institutions. In deciding which training opportunities to choose from, Ferrucci said, "It's a market driven process based on what employees need. If a new product is coming out and there is potential to incorporate it into our business model, we will take advantage of it."

Professional development programs from institutions and industry associations are also a good resource. Programs taught by faculty members or professionals are able to provide hands-on training targeted to specific, immediate needs of the industry. Standard Builders, Inc., a professional construction services company based in Newington, incorporates certificate programs offered by the Construction Institute, University of Hartford, as a part of their professional development plan.

Robert Sullivan, PE, president at Standard Builders said, “The Construction Management and Project Management certificate programs offered by the Construction Institute are a cornerstone to the employee professional development program at Standard Builders. We have found these programs to be affordable, of exceptional quality, and convenient for our employees to attend. These programs supplement the educational preparation employees have at the time of hire, and ensure that all team members have a common understanding of key issues in construction and project management.”

Choosing the right professional development opportunities allows employees to directly apply what they have learned to their specific job. Melinda George, project manager at KONE Americas is one professional who has been building her industry knowledge through the Construction Institute’s Project Management certificate program. “The knowledge I have gained from the Construction Institute has been immeasurably valuable in my career. With a lot of new construction projects happening at my firm, I was able to apply what I have learned in the real world.”

Expanding the possibilities through new education delivery methods

With the growth of technology available for teaching, trends in professional development are providing more options such as gamification, mobile, and blended learning. Employers say their delivery method preferences are driven mainly by the type of training. Ferrucci said, “No preference [on delivery method], but it depends on what the training is. Some training programs that are webinar based are more convenient because we have staff on projects throughout the state.” It’s also important to consider that employees have different learning styles when choosing a training option.

In the end, the continued development of employees needs to remain a priority to stay competitive in the industry. The increased variety of options for educational delivery methods means that companies can find programs for their employees that are the “right fit” for content; as well as for the investment of time and money. Joe Ferrucci agrees, “The challenge is that there are a lot of training opportunities out there. It’s a matter of looking at your staff needs, and if your organization is willing to make the investment.”

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