

LEARNING IS CONTINUOUS

Five Pillars to Ensure You Never Stop

By Walt Grassl

Many talented people feel that they do not have anything new to learn in their chosen field. They believe what got them there is enough.

Those who are determined and who work hard often spend a lot of time and effort to learn new skills and maintain their existing ones. They display the most current knowledge of new technology and ideas. Having employees who will improve themselves over and above the company-sponsored training is critical to an organization wanting to innovate and improve.

Eleven years ago, Ben got a job working in the mailroom at a local business during the summer before starting college. The company had been in existence for over 60 years and was currently being led by Jack—a long-time employee and company legend who started in the mailroom. Three weeks into the job, on his way from the basement to the top floor, the elevator stopped and who should enter the elevator but Jack. He smiled at Ben, introduced himself, and mentioned that he started out in the mailroom. Ben was a little star struck, but as they both exited the elevator, Ben asked if Jack had any advice for him.

“Never stop educating yourself,” Jack said. “In fact, come into my office and let me elaborate. I have 15 minutes before my next meeting.” Jack proceeded to share these five pillars for continued education:

1. You Are Responsible for Your Education

You alone are responsible for your education. Whether or not it makes sense to invest in a formal education, there are free and for-fee learning opportunities available to everyone. The public library and the Internet are two examples.

Another invaluable source of education is through people. Spend time with people who can do things that you can't. It may mean volunteering to stay late to observe someone, going to lunch with more experienced associates, or finding a mentor.

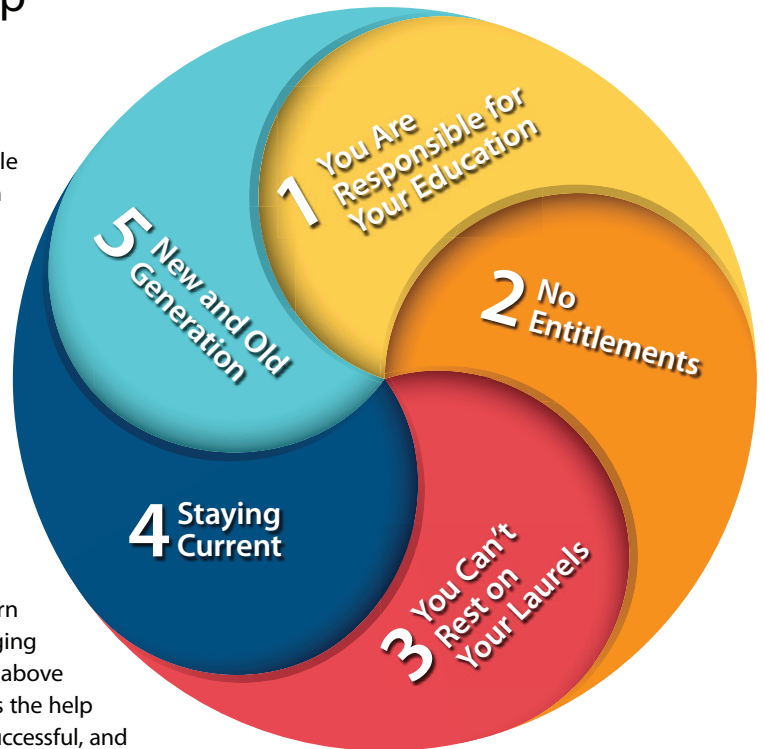
You can also learn by taking on challenging assignments that are above your skill level. Discuss the help you will need to be successful, and the company leadership may reward your initiative by providing an experienced staff member oversee your on-the-job training.

You can learn pretty much anything, if you work hard at it.

2. No Entitlements

Time in service should be no guarantee of advancement in a successful business. It is what one learns with his or her experience that determines the value of the service time. In other words, if you put in your time, you are guaranteed nothing.

“When you stop moving forward and rest on your laurels, in actuality you are falling behind all the others who continue to move forward.”



As your time with the company grows, seek lateral transfers or increased responsibility without necessarily a corresponding increase in title or pay. Realize you are making yourself more valuable to your employer, and view the stretch assignments as an investment in yourself.

Although we are living in a time of an increasing sense of entitlement, we must all take care of ourselves.

3. You Can't Rest on Your Laurels

Many talented people feel that they do not have anything new to learn in their chosen field. They believe what got them there is enough. They become complacent. They decide they don't need to put in more effort and stop striving for success.

When you reach a goal, celebrate your success, but identify your next goal and begin to take action. When you stop moving forward and rest on your laurels, in actuality you are falling behind all the others who continue to move forward.

4. Staying Current

Likewise, you need to stay current with industry trends by reading industry literature and blogs. If you are moving into management, read leadership books and blogs. New trends are frequently entering the workplace. You have the choice to be aware of and lead the change or try to catch up—or even worse—resist the change.

Joining industry and trade associations, and being an active, participating member, is another way to educate yourself on current trends.

5. New and Old Generations

A big issue in many industries is getting several generations to work well together. Each generation has different learning and working styles. You have several options to handle this reality. The first is to do nothing, since it's your fellow employees' responsibility to get with the program. You can leave it to your company's leadership to implement a program to fix the problem. The better choice is to educate yourself on the differences between generations, the issues these differences bring to the workplace, and some things others are doing to address the issues.

You can use this information to change how you interact, and to an extent, help your company improve their processes.

Ben took Jack's advice to heart. After graduating from college, he got a job with another company in another field. His education did not stop when he left school. He subscribes to industry and management blogs, has joined his industry association, seeks out challenging assignments, and develops relationships with other successful employees at his company. He has been identified by his management as a high-potential employee and is one of the youngest employees at his level. Ben's future is bright. Amazing what a chance encounter in an elevator can do. ●

Walt Grassl is a speaker, author, and performer. He hosts the radio show, "Stand Up and Speak Up," on the RockStar Worldwide network. Walt has performed standup comedy at the Hollywood Improv and the Flamingo in Las Vegas and is studying improv at the Groundlings School in Hollywood. For more information, visit www.WaltGrassl.com.

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"I think this is a great concept to take our profession to another level. It is also another way to show that our staff is a key component to infection prevention."

The certification program is based on the train-the-trainer model. In this model, AHE leverages the expertise of environmental services leaders and subject-matter experts to train health care trainers at various locations throughout the country. AHE's cadre of master trainers will facilitate a series of highly interactive two-and-a-half-day workshops targeted to health care trainers, managers, and supervisors.

The very first train-the-trainer session will be held in Grapevine, Texas, in September as a pre-conference workshop. AHE will offer two additional workshops—one on the East Coast and one on the West Coast—later in the fall. The cost to register for the workshop is \$950 per health care trainer. There is an additional cost for certification materials.

"I feel that it is extremely important that I provide resources and tools to enhance my employees' knowledge, skills, and abilities, and to enable greater alignment with our organization's goals."

"I think this is a great idea in the critical environment of health care, especially in the area of infection control. Practically every other discipline in health care requires some sort of certification... environmental services technician certification would only enhance the patient experience and organizational reputation."

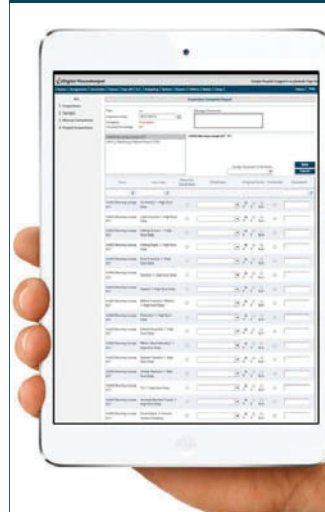
Defining the Future

A benefit of the program is that both trainers and technicians alike will receive recognition and respect for being a part of the CHEST program. In addition, technicians whose technical knowledge and skills can be affirmed and validated through this program will view themselves—and be viewed—as a vital part of the health care delivery team.

On a broader level, it's hoped CHEST certification will be the impetus for creating well-defined career paths for environmental services technicians who may have believed, when looking for career advancement, that there is nowhere for them to go within their organizations.

Join us at EXCHANGE 2015 this September, where we'll officially unveil this exciting new program. Thanks to the many contributors and experts who have already given so much to advance environmental services and help AHE in its mission to contribute to quality outcomes and healthy communities. ●

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