

LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION

Best Practices for a Strong Foundation

By Colby C. Morris, CHESP

There is a constant in health care that applies to us all, and it certainly will not change: training and ongoing education. This and the engagement of our staff in those activities are areas where we're continuously trying to stay on top of tracking, pushing, completing, and coaching. There are many ways that we've tried, and we've learned over time that some ways are more effective than others. So, if you are struggling with this part of the job—or have found struggles in keeping staff engaged and accountable—you are not alone. Here, I'll share best practices that I have learned along the way and borrowed from some great leaders.

Plan for Success

In the quest for success, you have to *plan* for success. Training may seem like an easy task if you are working with a smaller staff. Even then, the lack of a plan can be the cause of chaos. Those who have a larger staff certainly must have a plan of action—a way to track your staff's progress. Here is how we generally break down mandatory ongoing education requirements. First we break the staff into segments or groups. You can do that alphabetically, by ID number, or even by position type. Then breakdown mandatory educational topics by section. However you decide to do it, make each section manageable. To add to the mix, add deadlines to each section for each group to follow.

“Only by being visible will your staff trust you enough to be engaged.”



Track Progress

If you have assistant managers or supervisors, have them oversee the different groups. They each can manage their own process. Make sure to have them stay on course with the given timeline. Of course, account for those out on PTO, FMLA, etc. Be consistent with scheduling the training with others who are on a more consistent schedule. Be proactive and know who is coming and going, and when. It's important to schedule whether they'll have to complete training before or after their scheduled leave. Be sure to track completion every time something is accomplished, and do it graphically for all the team to see. Share everyone's progress, and do not underestimate the power of competitive nature.

Make it Habitual

For additional buy-in, make ongoing training and education an everyday routine. Train every day, teach every day, and make it a habit. Calendar it in, and plan ahead to be consistent. If you are only training when it is mandated, you are already behind the curve.

This has to become a part of your culture, a part of your leadership DNA. It should be an expectation of not just yourself, but of your staff as well.

Recognize High Performers

Make sure that you have identified high performers who you trust to educate their peers. By creating a train-the-trainer program, you can build up and train those high performers to be comfortable to present to their peers. They should have the confidence that you support their efforts and hold them in high regard. They need your

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respect and encouragement, and they can be a great tool for your department.

So how do you get there? How do you reach the point that it becomes part of your departmental DNA? Here are a few steps you will want to follow.

Be Present and See it in Action

First, be present. Be visible. Be out there and do it consistently. Know your staff, and gain their trust. Only by being visible will your staff trust you enough to be engaged. Second, make sure that you “train” all the time. Be on the floor, ask a lot of questions, and see it in action. Ask questions about what was taught or reviewed. Make it comfortable and low-key so they become accustomed to it and consider it a part of the everyday process. Your staff will begin to learn more by application, and it prepares them for questions that surveyors may ask.

Orchestrate Everything

It is one thing to have staff who can speak to the things they are learning, but it’s totally different when you ask them to

act on what they have learned. So your team knows RACE and PASS? That’s great. Now when on the floor, tell them to do it—to act out the situation. Tell them to pretend that the trashcan is on fire and to physically walk through all the phases of what they would do. Have them show you the closest fire alarm, the closest fire extinguisher, where the stairs are located, what number they would call, and what they would say. Then have them take the fire extinguisher out of the cabinet, walk over to the trashcan, and do everything but pull the extinguisher’s trigger.

We want them to learn things and be able to answer questions, but we also want them to actually know *what* to do when something happens. It is not enough to teach and educate on safety. You have to train, and you have to know the difference. Stay engaged in their learning and make it a constant expectation. Don’t just do this with RACE and PASS, but with all expected safety topics.

Set Goals

Finally, hold everyone accountable. Make training a part of their measurable

annual review goals. Make sure they are accountable to complete training on time as required. For example, if there are annual required trainings due by the end of November each year, in their annual review goals should be a metric that reflects that expectation. Each person should be accountable for their success and know that this is a goal that they are responsible for completing.

Ongoing education can certainly feel overwhelming. If you make it a standard part of your identification as a department, you will find that it becomes much more manageable of a process. Be engaged, have a plan, train your trainers, train consistently, orchestrate everything, and hold people accountable. Those are great pillars for an effective educational foundation. ●

Colby Morris is a CHESP certified professional who spent the last 10 years in environmental



services before moving into administration. Colby has led a staff as small as 15 to as large as 300, and has been actively involved with AHE for the last two years.

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