

Brigham Young University

# Food Service Systems Paper

The following paper pertains to an aspect of the food service system that was of particular interest to me: training adolescents. As a cook at The Charleston assisted living center, I frequently worked with high school students working as servers in their first job. Because of my interactions with them and participating in training them, I became very interested in knowing if there are methods that work best for that specific demographic and how they could be applied to the food service industry.

# Training Methods for Adolescent Employees

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## INTRODUCTION

The food service industry employs a large number of adolescents, often as either a high school or college job. For many it is their first experience with steady employment. As the newest members of the work force, this specific demographic presents many possibilities as well as challenges. Ideally, they have not had previous negative experiences that would discourage them from enjoying work or being productive employees. However, they may be unfamiliar with the employer-employee expectations and relationship, which could lead to undesirable negative experiences that would discourage productivity in the future. As adolescents first venture into the working world they have much to learn, and skills such as professionalism, initiative, motivation, and industriousness can all be cultivated during this crucial time. Unfortunately, too frequently this window of opportunity is missed and young employees leave their starting jobs with bad habits and unpleasant memories. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the training needs of adolescent employees, specifically how their training needs differ from older employees, if different methods should be used to train adolescents, and if these methods affect the productivity of young employees as they advance in the work force.

## OVERVIEW OF YOUTH IN FOOD SERVICE

In the food service industry effective training methods are especially important because statistics show that the majority of youth of working age are in fact working in a traditional setting, supervised by an employer or manager. Of those, 12% are in food service, which is surpassed only by retail sales, which employs 16% of working youth (1,2). This would indicate that one of the most effective ways to reach and train incoming employees would be through the food service industry. Unfortunately this opportunity is generally unrecognized or not addressed due to employer's lack of knowledge on training methods specific for youth.

## CURRENT TRAINING METHODS FOR THE GENERAL POPULATION

There are currently many common training methods for many different vocations, positions, and demographics. Some of these methods have been in use for many years, others are new and upcoming with current technological advancements. Among these are the traditional person-to-person instruction and the newer electronic methods of internet and CD-ROM training.

### In-Person

#### Instructional

Instructional training methods include lectures and demonstrations followed by or in conjunction with group discussion, drills, visualization, and reflection papers. In these methods employees are instructed in almost a classroom setting, and they may or may not be tested on the information after instruction. Instructional training is one of the most commonly used methods in a variety of professions (3). It is considered the traditional training method and is often done in a setting separate from the working environment.

#### Shadowing

Shadowing denotes being trained on the job by following and/or helping someone currently in the position being trained for. It is often used in hands on vocations where experience is key. Tests and follow up in this method are almost nonexistent, as objectives may not be outlined as formally as they would be in a presentation. Instead, objectives are simply an expectation and part of the overall job description. Evaluation, then, is simply based on whether or not the employee is capable of doing the job after he/she has been trained and how effectively he/she completes the assigned tasks compared to others who do the job or based on predetermined standards set by the employer.

## Electronic

Electronic training may be online via the internet, or on site via the intranet, CD-ROM, or DVD. Objectives are clearly laid out and a test almost always follows electronic training, often with at least one question dedicated to each learning objective (3). Electronic training is often seen as easier for both the employer and employee because it can be done in a variety of locations, is inexpensive, and easier to adjust or change as needed (3). However, there has been some concern that virtual training is taking away from the development of interpersonal skills (3). Some of the most highly valued skills deal with interpersonal relationships, especially in the work force where interaction with others is not only a frequent occurrence, but one that has a great impact on an employee's ability to complete jobs effectively.

## ADOLESCENT TRAINING METHODS

Employers often assume that youth cannot be trained the same way as adults. Because they are young and inexperienced, they are treated as incapable and often not invited to participate in or offer insight in the training or in the work environment. This discourages youth from using and developing skills helpful in increasing productivity (4). Instead, it fosters a minimalistic attitude and detaches youth from the workplace. Adolescents, as well as adults, want to direct their own learning, bring what they have to offer to the learning environment, and have it be appreciated. It is important to both age groups that they get to identify and set their learning goals, use a variety of media in training, and integrate new knowledge (4). In other words all employees, no matter their age, want to be valued, respected, and seen as important in the workplace.

Employers often forget that youth want to be valued and appreciated for their efforts and that they can have a positive contribution in the workplace by offering knowledge and skills. The

most detrimental mistake made when training adolescent employees is not valuing the insight and ideas they have to offer, thereby devaluing them, both as a person and an employee. In addition to appreciating and respecting employee's insights, it is important to make instruction interesting as well as informative. It is often easier to follow and remember ideas that are presented in a creative way.

### Informative vs Fun

There are many different ideas about effective teaching and training, often based on opinion or tradition instead of tested and proven methods. One of these methods is that training should be done in a classroom or instructional setting where information is presented and expected to be retained. However, it has been shown that telling is not training, and that in order to effectively train it must be done in an interactive setting, the most effective being the work environment itself (5). Information should not be spewed at an audience with the expectation that it will retain and do all that was taught. Instead, instruction should be fun and interactive, ideally providing an opportunity to practice the skills being taught. This is because there is a difference between hearing how to do something and actually doing it. In order to train appropriately, employees should be in a position to practice the skill and receive feedback on it immediately (4). Furthermore, it is important that training be enjoyable. If training methods do not capture the attention of those being trained nothing will be accomplished because employees will not process the information directed at them. Therefore, it is important that training methods be both fun and informative.

Methods that are both fun and informative can vary greatly depending on the job and the goal of the training. Rather than focusing on a specific format it is better to focus on what the

general feel of training should be. The founder of Toastmasters stated that “people learn most in moments of enjoyment” and consequently training meetings should be about providing an enjoyable and entertaining environment while presenting important information (6). Humor, entertainment, enjoyment, and connection are all aspects that create a productive training environment. Humor should be age and situation appropriate to make it most effective. Furthermore, humor should be connected with a training point that employees are to remember. When planning a training program it is important to remember that “fun is not so much something you say or do as an atmosphere you create (6).”

#### Boundaries vs Freedom

Everyone likes to be valued, appreciated, and trusted. This is especially true of adolescents who are trying to develop a sense of individuality and importance in the world (7). However, because they are young and inexperienced, adolescent employees are often not valued and are micromanaged because of the false belief that strict supervision is the best way to enhance performance in young employees. This is completely opposite of what youth need. In order to develop self-esteem and good skills it is important for youth to feel special or set apart in some way. They need to have an activity that they can not only do, but do well. In addition it is extremely important that they are able to receive positive feedback to reinforce what they are doing well. When giving feedback or praise it is most effective or meaningful to adolescents when it is tangible and quantifiable, such as a letter grade, a chart, or a certificate (7). While there is variability in skill and prior knowledge that would affect the productivity of adolescents, it is often over emphasized. Positive feedback, in connection with specific skills, is the most beneficial way to encourage development of those skills that would increase productivity (5). It is crucial that this not be done in a degrading or demeaning way, but should be based on positive

encouragement and reinforcement. Employees should be allowed to give their input and employers should value what they have to say. Likewise, leadership skills can be built when employers allow younger employees to take charge.

Micari et. al. (8) outline important considerations to help youth learn leadership through secondary means, specifically how important it is for youth to have experience “coaching” as opposed to just “teaching.” This is because the perception and skill required for coaching is very different from teaching. It requires youth to see things from a different perspective, specifically from another person’s perspective. Coaching requires helping others develop skills and find answers to problems, while teaching is simply presenting answers. Coaching, then, in a sense, is leading in a way that helps others learn to lead. This method is especially helpful in training adolescents. By coaching youth in the workplace and allowing these young employees to give input and have hands-on experience, rather than simply giving them information, they will learn invaluable leadership methods in the workplace that will help increase productivity.

#### LONG-TERM PRODUCTIVITY IN THE WORKFORCE

Training youth in a way that allows them to learn how to lead will have a major impact on the workforce by helping employers enhance productivity and giving younger employees a sense of purpose and leadership skills. This is especially effective when done early so that good habits and methods will be in place throughout the duration of an employee’s working experience, rather than having to train, or retrain, at some later point. Training adolescents in a way that increases confidence as well as skills will create employees that are better equipped to offer not only work skills but also leadership qualities, find increased satisfaction in work, are self-motivated, and help motivate others (7).

#### CONCLUSION



There are common training methods used in food service and other vocations. It is important to consider how well these methods teach employees, specifically adolescent employees because training impacts productivity. It is important to consider the developmental stage and experience level of young employees, as adolescents are still developing in many areas and often very limited in experience. Therefore, common training methods may not be effective for young employees because mentally, socially or emotionally they may not be at the same level as older, more experienced employees. As people become aware of these issues, training methods should change to enhance performance and productivity. This will benefit employers and employees both immediately and in the future by producing employees with more skills and leadership qualities. As youth are being trained more effectively, they will work better in their current jobs and take better skills with them in subsequent job. By learning good employee skills at a young age, adolescents will have more time to refine various job skills, both those specific to a particular job as well as more general skills. This will put them at an advantage over those who did not begin developing and refining these skills until post high school graduation. Training methods specific to adolescents will have a positive benefit on the work force by providing progress that would be slowed or lost if proper training methods were not used initially.

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