

The 9 key areas your managers need training on

Managers come into their positions from a variety of backgrounds and experience levels. Management training enables organizations to bridge some of those gaps as well as provides critical continuing learning opportunities for all supervisors.

Because leadership roles involve so many facets, companies sometimes struggle with what exactly to cover in managerial training. Here, we have broken down the vast subject into nine important areas that management training should cover:

Employment law (basic training)

The goal here is not to turn managers into lawyers. Rather, management training in this area should provide a solid base of knowledge so that situations do not venture into questionable legal territory. Federal employment laws important for supervisors to know the basics of how to comply with include:

- Job discrimination
- Overtime/minimum wage
- Family leave
- Age discrimination
- Disability discrimination
- Military leave
- Gender pay differences
- Workplace safety
- Pregnancy discrimination
- Immigration

Employee lawsuit risks

The best way to stop an employee lawsuit is to prevent one from ever beginning. Simple management mistakes and perceived slights start the snowball of discontent rolling downhill toward the courtroom. Supervisor training needs to focus on avoidance of actions that could potentially harm an organization's credibility in court. These might include:

- Sloppy documentation
- Unfamiliarity with company policies and procedures
- Inflated appraisals (and later trying to cite poor performance as justification for demotion or termination)
- Shrugging off complaints or turning a blind eye on negative situations
- Interview errors (especially asking personal questions or anything unrelated to the job)
- Being rude and mean-spirited

Hiring and interviewing

Building an effective staff starts with finding great talent. Increase the odds of selecting people who prove a good match for your organization's needs and goals through managerial training offering guidance on topics such as:

- Creating job ads that get at the heart of what you are looking for
- Asking effective interview questions
- Keeping interviews on track
- Learning how to market the position and company to the best applicants
- Verifying credentials and references
- Spotting liars
- Evaluating body language
- Listening to candidates rather than monopolizing conversation
- Watching for red flags such as tardiness to the interview, a history of job hopping, rudeness to staff, and an exceptional interest in money rather than the duties of the position

Performance reviews

Managers often dread these annual evaluations. But regular, organized feedback provides recognition of employee strengths and guidance on how to improve. The documentation also serves as a point of reference when making decisions regarding promotions and terminations. Management training should include subjects such as:

- Setting the right atmosphere
- Focusing on facts rather than opinion (as in "records show you are late at least twice a week" instead of "you are a slacker who can't make it to work on time")
- Providing detailed ways to make improvements
- Maintaining performance logs to simplify filling out evaluations
- Evaluating intangible characteristics such as "initiative" and "cooperativeness"
- Keeping consistent standards for all employees
- Motivating workers to make changes

Communication

Surveys show that workers consistently rank "communication skills" as one of the top necessities for being a good boss. Supervisor training in this essential area involves actions such as:

- Honing listening skills
- Paying attention to non-verbal cues
- Confirming understanding through asking questions or paraphrasing information
- Establishing clear expectations
- Noticing subtle signals of worker discontent
- Recognizing effort and achievement
- Confronting poor performers
- Offering timely, specific feedback
- Helping employees accept workplace changes
- Checking in with new employees to help them adjust

Coaching and motivating

Just as a coach leads an athlete to better performance, a manager needs the ability to get the best out of

individual workers and the team as a whole. Successful coaching sessions can help a poor performer turn his act around or an outstanding employee reach an even higher height. Supervisor training on coaching and motivating often involves learning how to:

- Ask appropriate questions that get at the employee's perspective
- Set goals that are clear, measurable, and obtainable
- Deal with attitude problems
- Identify disengagement and reverse it
- Handle employees with personal problems
- Encourage different generations to work in harmony
- Light a spark beneath underachievers

Management skills

As the people who oversee teams, both the company and staff members look to managers to direct in an effective, productive manner. Developing leaders who guide individuals and groups to greatness involves managerial training on things such as:

- Handling small problems before they become large ones
- Mastering organizational and time management techniques
- Delegating tasks
- Securing the appropriate resources for people to do their jobs
- Holding people accountable for their work
- Documenting employee actions and behavior
- Treating everyone fairly and managing without bias
- Decision-making
- Passing along information
- Developing trust
- Avoiding micromanagement

Managing difficult situations

Uncomfortable situations arise in any workplace. And while it may not be a supervisor's favorite part of the job, a manager must take steps to end conflicts, restore order, and handle tough circumstances. Management training in this area revolves around topics such as:

- Confronting problems head-on
- Identifying sources of conflict
- Strategizing solutions to clashes
- Gaining compliance from stubborn employees
- Calming angry staff members
- Dealing tactfully with a worker's personal problem, such as substance abuse or illness

Terminations

A final area crucial to management training (and, unfortunately, another less-pleasant aspect of being a leader) is knowing when to cut ties with a worker whose continued employment is not in the company's best interest. Managers also need to examine when an employee leaves the company of his own accord. Reasons for departure offer insight that may prove helpful to future hiring and retention efforts. Management training regarding involuntary and voluntary departure should center on issues including:

- Legal considerations about dismissal

- How to choose “firing words” carefully
- How to avoid excuses for not firing a poor performer
- What to say to other staff members after a colleague leaves
- What to ask during an exit interview
- How to handle the remaining two weeks after an employee gives notice