Types of employee training programs — which is the right fit?

Building a solid employee training program is important. Not only does training improve employee performance and ensure that new employees have the skills that they need to excel in their roles, but it can also improve employee engagement and retention. Training programs should support employees throughout their entire employee lifecycle so that they have the skills they need to grow and develop within the company. From onboarding to leadership development training, a good employee training program can help them feel supported, yet challenged all along the way. Here's what you need to know about how and when to provide employee training.

Common types of employee training programs

Creating a training program can help employees develop a wide range of knowledge and skills. Here are some of the most common examples of employee training programs.

Onboarding training programs

Most employers have a fairly organized employee training program that new hires go through. Of course, there may be some variation across departments, but there are typically several elements of the program that apply to everyone.

For example, all new hires may attend an HR orientation where they complete paperwork, learn about payroll and benefits and discuss important company policies and processes. The training program may then include product overview training and IT training. Once those are done it is common to finish the training program up with department-specific training. Onboarding training programs also often include set check-ins at regular intervals throughout the first 90 days of employment.

Product training

Sometimes product training can be wrapped into onboarding. However, most companies will need to have an ongoing product training plan. It is important that all employees understand the companies product or service offerings well. Many businesses would be well-served by building an ongoing product training program.

If your business updates its products or services or releases new ones regularly, consider having quarterly product training in addition to the more in-depth onboarding product training. You can also look for other ways to keep your team's product knowledge sharp through newsletters, contests, or quick trainings during staff meetings. Build a training program that offers frequent refreshers and updates.

Sales training

Having a sales training program is a must for most organizations. The basic sales skills are fairly transferable between businesses. However, sales staff need to understand your specific product or service, industry, competitor landscape, and target customers extremely well. As such, they'll likely need more in-depth training

in these areas than other staff. They may need an opportunity to practice and receive feedback on their approach to writing a sales email or making a sales call to your target customers. The basic negotiation and communication skills will transfer over, but the approach needs to be adapted to each new product and company that a salesperson represents.

Leadership development programs

Some organizations create their own internal leadership training program to build leadership skills in employees they want to prepare for higher-level positions. These types of programs are most commonly seen in medium-to-larger businesses that frequently promote from within. They are particularly helpful for employers in industries where management candidates may not necessarily have formal business management education.

These manager training programs help participants build up a wide range of skills including soft skills such as decision-making, communication, and critical thinking. The training programs typically are there to help participants understand and practice these skills within a management framework. Participants may practice presenting, analyzing sample data to make a decision for a department or the business, and other common leadership tasks.

Individualized employee training plans

There are certain trainings that all employees will need to partake in such as onboarding, sexual harassment training (requirements vary by state), and often some form of training on your company's product or service. However, outside of the larger training plans and programs. It's a good idea to create individualized training plans.

This is a training program that is often co-managed by HR and the employee's direct supervisor. Some businesses only offer individualized employee training plans in the form of targeted performance improvement plans for struggling employees. However, they can also be valuable for employees who need to develop new skills for their position, or who are interested in advancing to new roles.

In-person training program methods

While remote work is still on the rise, many businesses do still prefer to offer at least part of their training activities in-person. Some even require hybrid and remote employees to work onsite for their first week or two to allow for comprehensive in-person training before transitioning to working from home. Here are some methodologies that are commonly used for in-person employee training programs.

Instructor-led training

In-person training sessions are often offered in a style similar to college classes or lectures. They often include seminar-style instruction from a member of the HR team or someone in a leadership position. Additional instructional material may be provided such as handouts or short assignments.

A great thing to incorporate during instructor-led training to make your training program more well-rounded is roleplay. Dedicating a portion of the time for learners to roleplay the skills that they are learning can help the information stick better. Additionally, it allows them to practice in a safe environment before utilizing the new skills in a real work scenario. This is a technique particularly well-suited for sales training or communication skills training.

This in-person instructional method is becoming less popular due to the rise in remote or hybrid work models. However, instructors can still present and lead discussions over Zoom or other video conferencing software if necessary.

Job shadowing

Job shadowing is an employee training method that involves the new hire shadowing and observing an existing employee to see how they complete their work. The amount of time that job shadowing lasts can vary from one day to over a week. Often the employee that the new hire shadows will switch with them later on in the training program and watch them work to make sure that they are doing things correctly and to provide hands-on support.

Job shadowing can work in almost any field, though it can be a difficult training process to facilitate remotely. It's a good option in roles that have considerable safety or quality assurance concerns. For example, roles that operate heavy machinery, are in the healthcare field, or involve preparing food that will be served to customers are good candidates for job shadowing. Mistakes made by a new team member in those positions could lead to someone getting sick or injured. Job shadowing allows the new employee to see how things are done first and try out their new tasks under the direct supervision of a more experienced team member.

One other great thing about incorporating job shadowing into your employee training program is that it also adds a level of mentoring. Even after the shadowing is complete, the employee will still have someone that they now know and hopefully feel comfortable asking questions to go to for support throughout their first few weeks.

On-the-job training programs

Sometimes it's better to learn by doing rather than observing. On-the-job training allows new employees to dive right into their work (with copious supervision and support). Instead of shadowing for a while first, employees jump right into the task with guidance. This method can work well if the job duties are easily picked up or the candidate has relevant experience and transferable skills. If there is a notable skills gap, job shadowing or more formalized training may be a better option.

While on-the-job training programs do allow employees to start completing tasks more quickly, employers should factor in more time for employees to complete their work. They are likely going to need to pause and ask questions and may need to move through tasks more carefully. Don't expect them to hit normal productivity goals right out of the gate. The first weeks of on-the-job training should be considered a training period and not factored into any performance scores or subject to productivity quotas. Give employees the time and support that they need to lay a strong foundation and learn how to do things the right way.

Online training program methods

Online training programs are great for internal training, professional development, and required compliance training. One of the best parts of online training programs is that they can often be completed asynchronously at their own pace. Online training programs also help meet the training needs of remote or hybrid employees.

Live online training sessions

Webinars and online sessions are a popular way to host online training sessions. These are similar to traditional instructor-led training. Often instructors or training leaders share their screens and go through a PowerPoint presentation with the group providing information on the topic of the session.

These live sessions are a nice way to make online learning more interactive for remote employees that don't get to engage with their team in person. Hosting the session live also allows time for a Q&A to address any questions or concerns that employees may have. Unlike in-person instructor-led sessions, online sessions can be recorded and easily shared with anyone who was unable to attend.

Third-party online training courses

Online courses from third parties can be a practical option for businesses that aren't equipped to provide the training in-house. There are a large number of courses and certification programs available online. Many employers provide their staff with access to tools like LinkedIn Learning to facilitate ongoing employee training and development. LinkedIn learning can also be a great resource for soft skills training and basic technical training.

For more in-depth technical training, it is often worthwhile to explore online certificate programs. Some are even offered by the software vendor. HubSpot offers HubSpot academy to help marketing and sales staff better utilize its customer relationship management software. Google also offers online certificates for Google Analytics and other Google systems.

These are a great add-on to your overall employee training program. Offering subscriptions to Coursera, LinkedIn Learning, HubSpot Academy or similar online learning platforms is also an effective way to support professional development. Employees can have more freedom to choose what they want to learn or managers

can work with employees to select relevant courses during performance check-ins.

Of course, Business Management Daily also offers a number of [live-interactive webinars](#) and [pre-recorded trainings](#) to help you meet your training needs!

How to create your own digital training program

If you don't want to shell out for a 3rd-party online training program or you want to create more individualized training on your company's specific product or policies, consider taking a DIY approach.

There are a number of e-learning platforms and learning management systems (LMS) that can help businesses build their own training programs. Smaller businesses that don't have the budget for special training software can also create their own online training through tools that they are already familiar with.

A common approach is to record videos (these can be recordings from past live training sessions through a service like Zoom). Then, create quizzes through Google Forms to test trainees on their information retention (and to make sure that they actually watch the video). This is a cheap and easy way to conduct shorter trainings for your product training program, HR policy overview trainings, and other trainings that don't require an interactive component.

Choosing the right training delivery method

Choosing between all of these training options can be challenging. The right employee training program will be built around the training needs of the organization and the employees. It is important to understand the different learning styles and to keep them in mind while developing your company's employee training program.

Some learning styles to consider while building your program are:

- **Visual.** Learning by seeing or watching.

- **Verbal.** Learning by reading or writing.

- **Auditory.** Learning by hearing.

- **Kinaesthetic.** Learning by doing.

- **Social.** Learning through collaboration and teamwork.

- **Solitary.** Learning independently.

Accommodating all of these learning styles can be challenging. In most cases, a blended learning model is ideal. Blended training programs incorporate multiple training types and methods to provide a more comprehensive experience to trainees. Consider combining online and in-person components, such as having employees complete an online course or orientation before jumping into job shadowing. If you hire remote staff, combine live group virtual calls with individualized asynchronous coursework to allow for both social and solitary learning.

Find the mix that best meets your employees' needs. Also, be sure to collect post-training surveys to solicit feedback from trainees to identify any gaps in the training.