

Quality Corner

“Training” is Not a Dirty Word!

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One thing I like most about delivering my “documents” program for ASCP Workshops for Laboratory Professionals is watching the faces of the participants when they grasp the paradigm-shifting concept of work process flowcharts as the basis for procedures manuals and using the transformed manuals as the basis for designing employee training and related competence assessment. So, I was duly chagrined to receive an e-mail following one of my recent programs in which a participant was unhappy that I used the word “training” in relation to laboratory professionals. Many years back, the sender had been told by a prestigious laboratory professional that “monkeys get trained; human beings get educated and oriented. People are not monkeys.”

Unfortunately, this perception is yet another example of people using two (or more) different words to mean the same thing. I constantly hear workshop participants use the words “policy,” “process,” and “procedure” to refer to a single type of document (eg, an “SOP”) when, in fact, these words represent 3 different document types that are not interchangeable at all if clear communication is intended.

Let’s take a closer look at the definitions of education, orientation, and training; then we can better determine if the sender’s admonishment was accurate. Here are definitions I gleaned from a search of *Webster’s Dictionary* and the American Society for Training and Development (www.astd.org), whose body of knowledge on the subject of the design and development of all types of education and training is extensive and well respected.

“Education—formal schooling at an institution of learning; developing knowledge, skill, mind, character, etc, especially by formal schooling.”

“Orientation—familiarization with and adaptation to a situation or environment, as in aligning new employees with an organization’s culture; information on the organization’s mission and values, so as to encourage new employees to embrace that culture.”

“Training—knowledge instruction and practical performance on how to do something applicable to a person’s job function; the teaching to individuals of hands-on knowledge and skills to better do the hands-on portions of their jobs.”

(*Note: Webster’s Dictionary* also has this definition of training: “to discipline or condition [animals] to perform tricks or obey commands.” This definition, however, comes *after* the definition above! Which would *you* like to refer to you?)

Hmmm...both orientation *and* training sound like what we do when new employees join our laboratories. Isn’t the intent of hospital and laboratory orientation to align new staff with the organization’s mission, vision, values...and benefits? Isn’t the intent of training to show and tell new employees how to do the tasks described in their respective job descriptions? Isn’t the purpose of both to ensure that all new staff—regardless of the knowledge and experience they bring to their new employer—receive teaching about the knowledge and skills needed to do their jobs? Isn’t it obvious that *neither* of these is education?

Education focuses on the *future* job of the learner and makes the learner aware of knowledge and skills, which are then assessed through tests of knowledge.¹

Perhaps the sender’s view stems from a lack of understanding that there is a difference between professional training linked to education programs and employment training. Professional training is that received when enrolled in a formal program of study,¹ such as the clinical portion of medical technologist, medical technician, histotechnologist, cytotechnologist, and phlebotomy clinical rotations, where the “knowledge, skill, mind, and character” of a laboratory professional are initially developed. Professional training is an ASCP requirement that must be met to qualify for the Board of Registry examinations.

Employment training, on the other hand, is focused on the person’s present job, in which the person must learn and then demonstrate skills needed for job tasks and then be assessed through his or her job performance.¹ Employment training should be given to 1) all new employees who need to learn how to do their new job duties and responsibilities and 2) to existing employees when they need to learn a new or changed process, such as a new computer system or new testing instrument. We all know people who are very educated—ie, “book-learned”—but who can never seem to manage to get any real work done. As a former transfusion service manager and SBB with years of experience, I am very educated in transfusion medicine; however, if I became a new employee in *your* laboratory, I would need employment training in your transfusion service’s processes and procedures, which could be very different from those we had used. Employment training is *crucial* to an employee’s competence and successful job performance.

Of course we’re not monkeys! We are highly educated *and* *trained* laboratory professionals who make an important contribution to patient care. Armed with this information, let’s experience a paradigm shift about the importance of *all* of education, orientation, and training in the laboratory profession.

1. CLSI/NCCLS. *Training and Competence Assessment; Approved guideline, second edition, GP21-A2*. Wayne, PA; Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute: 2004. *Note:* This guideline is being updated to the 3rd edition for release in 2008.

This Month’s Quality Quote:

“Training increases skill and competence and teaches employees the *how* of a job. Education increases their insights and understanding and teaches the *why*.”

—Hammer and Champy



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