

STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE

January/February 2004

Training Your Most Valuable Resource by Libby Maurer, based on a BCMC 2003 presentation by Dan Dollar, Technical Department Manager, Gang-Nail Truss Co. of Visalia

Putting the pieces together: Training new production employees and technicians may be more beneficial for team development and staff retention than you think.

If you doubt the power of a comprehensive new hire training program, you could be missing out on the many benefits that a training program can bring you as management, your entire staff, and the company as a whole. At BCMC 2003 in Phoenix, Gang-Nail of Visalia Engineering Manager Dan Dollar explained that a new hire production or technician training program can positively impact plant culture, attention to safety and hazards, quality control and team development.

TRAINING IS NOT AS COSTLY AS THE REVOLVING DOOR

If you think training programs represent unnecessary costs and wasted resources, take a moment to digest Dollar's rationale in favor of training. You may find yourself in a dizzying revolving door of taking the right steps to make a hire and then losing that employee shortly thereafter. Compare the cost associated with that process to the cost of developing and running a new hire training course. Put in those terms, investing in the creation of a sound training program is far less costly in the long run than getting caught up in that revolving door. Dollar spoke of his training philosophy from the opposite perspective too: "It isn't fair to new hires or even seasoned employees to neglect up-front training. New hires deserve the chance to succeed while seasoned employees should not be expected to shoulder the bulk of the training burden."

EMPLOYEE RETENTION & COMMON GOALS

According to Dollar, employee turnaround in both the production and design departments has been significantly minimized with the implementation of Gang Nail's solid training program. Dollar believes that during the first days of the program, new hires are given a true taste of the company's goal: deliver a quality product in a timely manner. This is important, says Dollar, because it is often difficult for new employees to understand that overall big picture goal. With a step-by-step training program, you are able to feed them small, daily, manageable goals that will add up to that big picture company goal.

Dollar also says the program stresses teamwork. "We created our program to facilitate team development from day one. When new hires realize they are playing on the same team, you begin to notice a sense of common direction and goals from everyone." Additionally, the program drives home the notion of respect for safety procedures and discourages the 'Lone Ranger' attitude. These are employees who are withdrawn and introverted; they don't interact and communicate well with the team, which are personality traits that Dollar says is a danger to

the essential team attitude. "Lone Ranger-type of attitude jeopardizes safety and quality in a way that undermines the goal of team development." Dollar believes strongly in applying the concepts within the proverb, "train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it," which is stressed thoroughly in Gang Nail's new hire training program.

BEYOND MORALE LIES MECHANICS

Beyond encouraging team development and impacting morale, Gang-Nail's training program outlines the mechanics of the job as well as company policies. Even if the new employee has come to the company with ten years of experience in the industry, there are different procedures and technology at every component manufacturing facility. You will be much better off taking the time to outline those changes now, rather than having to deal with a devastating mistake down the road.

PRODUCTION TRAINING

Dollar outlined Gang-Nail's production training schedule that all new shop employees complete before joining the rest of the staff in the plant. It consists of a five-day training program: four classroom days and one day in the plant.

Day One:

- Truss Introduction, Overview and History
Discussion: Who were the industry pioneers and how has our industry changed? What is a truss, how does a truss work and what are the components of it?
- Plant Tour
- Lumber and Plate Inventory Procedures
- Demonstration of house models

Day Two:

- Introduction to truss language, terminology
- Introduction of truss configurations

Day Three:

- Production Documents, Actions and Attitudes
- Shop Drawings (crucial information like plate and lumber specifications)
- Layout and Truss Placement Plan (proper labeling and truss sequence)
- Production Control List
- Truss Package Order
- Attitudes, Lone Rangers and Teamwork
- Quality Control (missing, misplaced or improperly imbedded plates; cracked or broken material)

Day Four:

- Puller Position Description (expectations and results)
- Job Functions (duties and activities)
- Performance Standards

Day Five: Plant

Goal: put material covered in the classroom training portion to work in the plant.

- Puller Position Application
- Bander, Banding Material and Nail Gun
- Key Result Area Participation: allow the group to view demonstrations from seasoned employees and then participate in doing the task together

Gang Nail's philosophy for the training process is to provide a solid base for new employees to build skills. Employee retention and future advancement in the company are the main goals of the program from a human resources management perspective, which is why so many topics are covered in the first week. Are they going to memorize every scrap of information? That isn't the point, Dollar stated. "The goal is not for them to be able to recite every piece of new information at the end of the week. The goal is to get them orientated with the industry, the terminology and our company." Finally, Dollar was adamant about the reminder that training does not end on the fifth day. It is important to remember the three Rs for all employees, not just the new hires: Repetition, Reinforcement and Reminders.

Dollar began his career in the forest service and eventually took a job at a start-up truss manufacturing business. After a few years he joined Gang-Nail Truss Co., where he worked on the saw crew, in production planning and in truss design. He is currently the Engineering/Design Manager.

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