



Bridging the Skills Gap

It's a startling fact that baby boomers are retiring at a rate of 10,000 per day. These men and women are leaving critical job functions, often at the heart of organizations. When senior management, executives, maintenance technicians, and engineers retire, they leave behind a gap that's hard to fill.

Job Functions Experiencing Skills Gap

Critical job functions experiencing this skills gap in the industrial and production sectors include:

- Engineers
- Purchasers
- Reliability engineers
- Maintenance technicians

They take with them a wealth of tribal knowledge that is hard to replace with traditional training and education—all too often, when essential workers retire, critical knowledge of the processes they employ leaves with them.

Many companies see this loss as a normal trend—after all, companies have always had to replace retiring workers. However, there has never been a time in recent history where as many employees are retiring at the rate they are today. The impact of this trend is exacerbated by the comparatively low number of workers coming into the workforce. Unfortunately, many organizations simply are not prepared to deal with this change in demographics.

Solutions

Although the loss of important workplace skills is disturbing, it is not a situation without hope. There

are a number of straightforward steps that companies can take to improve the skill levels of their current and incoming workforce.

Education

The skills gap is, at least in part, an education gap. Successful companies include a thorough educational component with any training plan they implement.

Educational programs can take many forms, often taking advantage of improvements in communication technology, including:

- Webinars
- Learning Management Systems (LMSs)
- In person, hands-on, classroom setting

Using these methods, critical topics including applications, processes, health and safety issues, and techniques can be presented in a coherent and easily understood manner by experienced experts in the field.

Education can present a helpful guide to handling these topics in a safe way as they arise within facilities. However, the whole picture on the above areas of study cannot be presented using educational training methods alone. The knowledge and experience of savvy, long-serving employees cannot be captured in full using online or classroom-based teaching tools.

Collecting Knowledge from Retiring Workers

In addition to practical teaching methods, companies must look at how they can capture the knowledge and expertise directly from their experienced workforce before they leave, taking their skills and understanding with them.

If they don't capture the essential knowledge held by their departing workforce, organizations will find

themselves in a situation where they may never be able to regain that level of knowledge and understanding—putting them in an extremely uncompetitive situation for the future.

Experienced employees should be encouraged to log and record anything that would be beneficial for those coming after them. Process-based aids such as checklists and manuals, compiled using the years of accumulated experience, can be hugely beneficial for new starters and fellow employees alike.

Documentation is vital for new workers, but what works best is actual on-the-job (OTJ) training. And this is the focus of the next section.

Training

OTJ training is absolutely critical. Seminars, on-site, or online training provide a certain amount of understanding—but passing knowledge down directly from experienced personnel provides a level of understanding that comes only from interacting with people who understand processes and effective production methods. Unless organizations can achieve this level of training, it becomes almost impossible to capture the skills and knowledge that is being lost every day.

The way organizations go about OTJ training is often unstructured, slow, and places too heavy a burden on one or two members of staff. If your skilled employee

leaves before passing on enough of their expertise, or if the employees being trained move on before your company can benefit from their newly acquired skills, then the time and resources spent in the training have been wasted.

The solution to these issues may well be to partner with a company with the skills and resources to provide exactly the training and support your employees require.

Support from an Experienced Training Partner

Finding a partner with the experience and expertise to train your workers as part of an ongoing process can be the best way to remedy the issues caused by the growing skills and knowledge gaps.

An experienced partner, familiar with the production, technology, and safety issues in technical and production-oriented organizations, offers instant access to the kinds of knowledge currently being lost due to retirements. Businesses can augment their on-the-job training with outside experts who can visit their facilities and support OTJ and educational initiatives.

Once in effect, your newly minted training process can then be used to recruit and train the next generation of your workforce—putting your organization at a significant advantage over other companies in your sector who are struggling to replace lost skills, knowledge, and experience.

Valin is the leading technical solutions provider for the energy and technology industries. For 40 years, Valin has offered personalized order management, onsite field support, comprehensive training, and applied expert engineering services utilizing automation, fluid management, precision measurement, process heating, filtration, and fluid power products.

800.774.5630 | www.valin.com

Connect with us

