

Help sheet no. 28

Workplace learning

Learning ‘on the job’ makes an important contribution to best practice. There are many ways staff can learn more from opportunities that exist or can be created in their day-to-day work. One of the advantages of workplace learning is that it can be more readily incorporated into behaviour and practice because it is likely to be more directly relevant and more immediately available. To maximise the learning, the focus is on the learner.

Creating learning sessions

Try setting aside a 20 minute session once per week (for example, after handover each Wednesday) for planned learning. Decide to have a topic, a resident or an issue as the focus for the session. Identify the topic each week for the following week and have a different staff member volunteer to prepare an 8–10 minute talk. Another staff member can be the facilitator of the session. All staff should be involved in these different roles.

Once the talk is delivered, questions, comments and queries will be encouraged by asking open-ended questions that invite participation and problem-solving.

Maybe you don’t need to have a formal presentation – just work from the staff knowledge and experience.

Complete a round of six sessions and then review how it is going. Ensure all participants contribute their views to this evaluation and plan for continuing in the same or modified form. Remember, there is no need to have the sessions all year. Give everyone a breather and keep the sessions stimulating.

Presenting to a group – a few pointers

- People learn best when their needs have been assessed – consider what people need to know or are interested in.
- Help people focus on your topic by asking them to think about a recent experience of it (for example: ‘What have you found to work best for this resident?’). A question helps listeners tune into the meaning in your talk.
- Plan to say about 100 words per minute – prepare only 800 words for an eight-minute talk. Try to ‘speak’ rather than ‘read’.
- Design your talk in manageable chunks of information and ideas, and emphasise ‘headings’ to help keep people in touch with the different sections of your talk.
- Consider using handouts, posters/charts to display some visual information. It doesn’t need to be flashy – just helpful by presenting information to make it easier to understand and remember.
- Give out a copy of an article, encourage others to read it.
- Ensure staff are given opportunities to think and talk about the information and ideas you have presented.

Individuals learn differently

Tips for designing activities to facilitate effective learning:

- While some of us like to think before trying something out or speaking to others about it, others may like to talk in a group to explore the topic before being left with it on their own. Others may like to listen or read and then take time to reflect and draw their conclusions. We need to allow for these different preferences.
- Some people prefer words and diagrams, others like listening or trying things out or working in discussion groups.
- Some people like to know the whole picture in order to understand what we are learning and why. Others will prefer to build the picture by knowing the details first.
- Some educationalists talk about a learning cycle – act, reflect, theorise (find meaning), try it in practical ways. While we may have a preference for one of these steps, if we are to make the learning complete, we need to take all steps to complete the ‘cycle’.

Helping staff learn at work

Examples of processes to help staff learn include:

1. Creating a project group to work on an organisational problem is a good way of staff being involved in problem-solving and owning the problem and the solution (for example, dealing with families, implementing new regulations).
2. If a staff member attends a seminar, conference or is undertaking formal studies, their learning can be enhanced if their workplace is involved. If it is appropriate and the staff member is willing, the following techniques can be used:
 - Have regular chats about the course.
 - Invite the staff member to present on a topic from the course/seminar to others in the facility.
 - Help the staff member write down some learning objectives for the seminar/conference they are attending.
 - Ensure the staff member reflects on the learning activity, for example provides a short written report or feedback to colleagues.

Information is not the same as learning

We need to **do something** with information to make it meaningful. A good learning session will have discussion, questions, exercises and activities that help each individual interact with the information and ideas.

Finally, remember RRR and E: learning needs to be REPEATED, REINFORCED, REWARDED and ENJOYABLE!

References

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