

# 10 EH&S Software Training Tips...

## or Teaching Old Dogs New Tricks

Last October, my family adopted a puppy that had been rescued from a shelter. She'd had a difficult early life and lacked basic obedience skills, so once she became healthy, we enrolled her in a puppy obedience class. We anxiously attended orientation, completed our reading assignments, pledged to follow the trainer's instructions, and bought (a garageful of) training supplies before even taking the puppy to her first class. Little did we know that most of the training would be directed toward us and not the dog! Before we could expect her to know what to do, we had to learn the commands ourselves.

A few weeks later, I held a series of training sessions for users of a new environment, health, and safety (EH&S) software system. While the trainees were all experienced EH&S professionals and systems administrators, they each had different computer skill sets, capabilities, and learning styles. And although we performed a thorough check of all of the equipment beforehand, we still experienced login problems on some of the computers and even had the training center server crash during one session. While the training was an overall success, the experience brought to my mind our puppy training efforts, and that you should never take

lightly the need for training, whether it is professional development or dog obedience training. Many organizations assume that they can teach their staff to use new EH&S software in a single training session. This can be risky—you should not expect everyone to become a tech-savvy user overnight, if ever. If you are planning to train your staff to use new EH&S software, whether they are shop-floor operators or seasoned EH&S professionals, you might find the following tips useful to make your software training effort a success.

### 1 IDENTIFY OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Before you begin training, clearly state the training objectives and learning outcomes. The objectives are what the trainer sets out to achieve, whereas the learning outcomes are what the students must demonstrate at the end of the session. For example, the training objectives might be to provide background information on the EH&S software initiative, teach students how to use the software, and to prepare them for the software rollout. By the end of the training session, therefore, students should be familiar with the software interface, task management and document management features, and should know how to report errors and issues.

### 2 TAILOR TRAINING TO THE AUDIENCE

Understand the intended audience's needs and tailor the curriculum accordingly. For example, provide one training curriculum for casual end users, another for more tech-savvy users, a third for management, and a fourth for systems administrators. Avoid providing infinite detail to casual users who will access only a few data entry forms or reports. If you must use technical jargon, then supply definitions.



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In addition, select a suitable training delivery method. For example,

- Instructor-led classroom training, where an instructor provides a mix of lecture and hands-on training exercises in a classroom setting.
- Live Web training, where an instructor provides a mix of lecture and hands-on training exercises from an offsite location via the Internet.
- Facilitated computer-based training, where students take computer-based training modules in a classroom setting with a trainer and/or facilitator.
- Computer-based training, where a student takes the training course on his/her own schedule without a trainer. Training may be delivered via the Internet or by using CDs, DVDs, or files stored on the organization's server.

### 3 PRESENT A STRUCTURED CURRICULUM

Both linear and global thinkers can benefit from a structured curriculum. Begin with the basics and drill into the details. Develop training materials to complement the curriculum and provide students with reference materials that they can use after leaving the classroom.

### 4 REINFORCE INSTRUCTION WITH HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE

There is no substitute for hands-on experience, especially when one's job depends upon the successful use of EH&S software. Use an iterative training approach to strengthen software skills.

### 5 SELECT A QUALIFIED TRAINER

Whether you choose an in-house trainer, one provided by your software vendor, or a third-party consultant, be sure to find one that is qualified. Look for a breadth and depth of experience with your EH&S software package, knowledge of the EH&S subject matter to be covered, and, if possible, knowledge of how your company does business. The trainer must have good presentation and listening skills and be able to establish a good rapport with the students.

### 6 SCHEDULE TRAINING STRATEGICALLY

Timing is everything. Schedule training close to the software rollout date for better knowledge retention. If your software initiative includes a "pilot," schedule training for participants close to the pilot start date. If your users will do acceptance testing, schedule preliminary training before testing starts, and follow up with further training close to the software's "live" rollout date. Avoid scheduling training sessions close to regulatory deadlines or holidays.

### 7 ASSESS BASIC SKILLS

Having computer novices and computer-savvy students in the same classroom can be a struggle, as some students will continuously play catch-up to the rest of the class and others may want to surge ahead. Assess the students' computer skills and schedule classes by skill level, if possible.

The computer skill level often tracks the student's job classification. If you must mix students with a wide range of computer skills, consider seating tech-savvy students next to novices and allow them to collaborate during the hands-on exercises. Also consider inviting a few experienced users to act as classroom facilitators.

## 8 PROVIDE A HIGH-QUALITY TRAINING ENVIRONMENT

A high-quality classroom environment minimizes distractions and enhances a positive learning experience. There are pros and cons to both offsite and onsite training. Offsite training gets students away from the normal distractions of an office environment, while onsite training reduces travel time and costs.

The training facility must have sufficient space, hardware, and software to meet your needs. If your EH&S software application is delivered via the Internet, ensure that the training facility has adequate Internet connections and bandwidth. Provide each student with computer and monitor setups similar to those found in their work areas. Use a computer projector to show training slides and software demonstrations to the whole group and have students follow along on their computers. Remember to test all equipment, electrical outlets, and Internet connections before the training session begins.

## 9 EVALUATE THE TRAINING

Don't forget to evaluate the training to gauge its effectiveness. You can collect data for various purposes; for example, to assess the course structure, content, or hands-on exercises, as well as the teaching processes, trainer, and training environment. Provide a brief paper- or computer-based questionnaire and ask each student to complete it before leaving the classroom. You can also evaluate the impact of the software training by administering a post-training proficiency test. Consider an "open book" test that allows students to use the software and course materials to answer the test questions.

## 10 ESTABLISH A SUPPORT SYSTEM

Student questions do not end with the training session. Implement a support system to address questions during and after the software rollout. Appoint EH&S systems administrators and tech-savvy users as the first line of contact during the critical rollout period, and convert to a standard "help desk" process within a few weeks after the rollout.

Yes, you can teach old dogs new tricks. You need to know how to read their behaviors, teach them terminology, and put a good support system in place. Reinforce good behaviors with praise—and treats!—and allow them to make mistakes. The same is true with training people to use EH&S software (except for the treats). Understand their needs and skill sets and structure a curriculum that is tailored to their needs. Provide a positive learning environment and feedback. Bear in mind that training costs are a fraction of the overall software project costs, and a positive outcome is essential to the success of the software initiative. **em**