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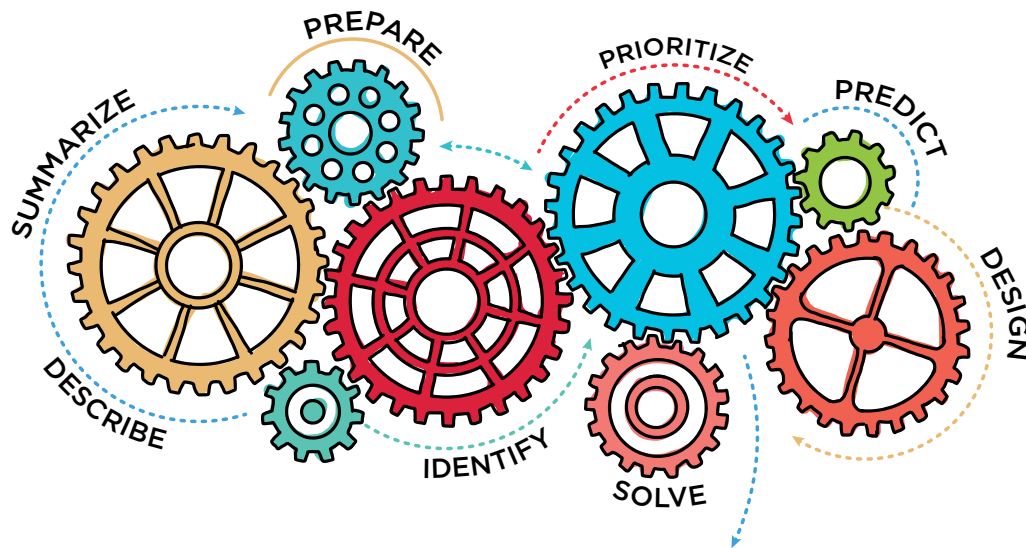
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# Training Plans 101

By Beth Roessner

» With a solid plan in place, managers and directors can ensure that staff training is both effective and efficient all throughout the year.



You're likely familiar with the saying, "failing to plan is planning to fail." This phrase is applicable in many situations, including the school nutrition setting, where the adage acts as a valuable reminder for operators to "always be prepared." (Another good saying. Thank you, Boy Scouts of America.) From coordinating daily school meals to managing service when a hurricane threatens, planning is the secret sauce that allows school nutrition operators to get the job done, no matter the challenge.

Do you look at staff training through the same lens? Sure, you have established training procedures to orient new hires. You also probably annually organize at least one school- or district-wide formal inservice training, typically scheduled just ahead of the new school year. But are you really *planning* for the long-term training needs of long-time staff?

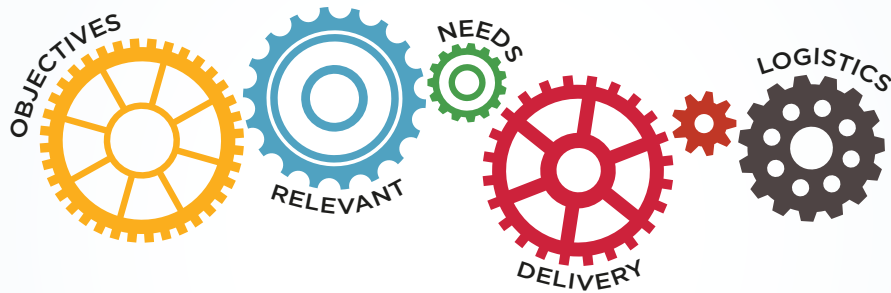
Generally speaking, training keeps your team, your operation and your customers safe, up-to-date and in regulatory compliance. Studies link various benefits to the availability of training, such as staff morale and retention. Plus, a certain number of annual training

hours are required by the federal government.

But are you matching the right training to the right staff? Surely your cashiers don't need the same training as your warehouse crew? (Or do they?) Does a 10-year procurement specialist have the same training needs as an assistant cafeteria manager with the potential to climb the ladder? (It depends.)

With so many variances in job responsibilities, staff tenure and the ever-changing school nutrition workplace, it's important to be strategic. While it may seem near impossible to develop a cohesive training plan that meets every employee's needs, by understanding the

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factors that go into such a plan, you can develop an effective and efficient methodology for training your entire staff.

A training plan enables Dr. Ashley Powell, SNS, child nutrition director, **Auburn City (Ala.) Schools** to stay organized. When she puts a training on the schedule, she's ensuring her employees continue their professional development. "When you put a plan in place, the people know what they're working toward. They have purpose and function," explains Powell. "As a director, I feel responsible that all my employees have opportunities to be successful."

### STANDARDS FOR SN PROS

Professional standards for employees working in K-12 foodservice operations that offer the federal child nutrition programs were made law in the 2010 Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA). The specifics of that law set education standards for the hire of new directors (and state agency staff), as well as establish minimum annual training hours for employees at all levels. Each year:

- » Directors must receive 12 hours;
- » Managers require 10 hours;
- » All other staff who work more than 20 hours/week require at least six hours; and
- » Part-time staffers working less than 20 hours/week are required to tally up four hours.

Training can take many forms (short classes, long workshops, association conferences, targeted instruction) and whether it's offered in 15-minute increments or multi-hour blocks, it all adds up.

To comply with the Professional Standards rule, training must fall into one of four key areas, which just

happen to match the ones in the bars on the previous page.

The guidance about the federal rule also *suggests* training topics for each employee level, but discretion is up to the supervisor. The most important consideration is ensuring that the training be relevant to the employee's job or possible advancement. As with all federal requirements that affect school foodservice, this is the *minimum* standard. State and local policies may add hours or dictate specific areas of focus; be sure to take these requirements into account when developing your plan.

### PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

The basics of an effective training plan, according to the directors who spoke with *SN*, include several common elements: conducting a needs assessment; identifying the target audience and ensuring the training will be relevant; selecting training models/delivery options; setting learning objectives; and coordinating logistical details like scheduling, costs, locations, etc.

#### Determine What Employees Need.

A *needs assessment* is an effective means of determining timely topics for upcoming training. How do you compile such an assessment? Start by confirming if your state or district requires any specific topics. Next, begin combing through available data. In what areas did the team fall short on the last Administrative Review? How about the last health inspection? Compare production records and participation reports. Study Worker Compensation claims and performance evaluations. You might be surprised at the revealing insights that could point you in the direction of needed training.

If discomfort with data analysis

suggests a potential training area for *you*, just brainstorm your needs assessment the old-fashioned way: observation. Have there been increases in falls or burns in your kitchens? Have you been asked to referee conflicts among employees? Is new equipment gathering dust because no one is comfortable using it? Are there some new employees who struggle with basic knife skills? Do managers fully understand their financial responsibilities?

By taking ongoing note of employee needs, you're better able to address these issues before they become bigger problems. "We are out in our kitchens a lot, and we just observe what it seems like people are having difficulty with," explains Lyn Halvorson, SNS, school nutrition supervisor at **La Crosse (Wis.) School District**. "We don't just pull it out of the air."

#### How Will You Make It Relevant?

Identifying and understanding your *target audience* is no small matter. "We are a wildly diverse group of people with a wildly diverse level of skills," Halvorson says. "We have some people who have been in the district 25 years, and they have it down. We also have some people who have been in the district 25 *days*."

While addressing diverse ranges of education, confidence and experience levels, also consider that adult learners—unlike children—need to buy into their education in order to invest time and attention to it. They want to know "What's in it for me?" (WIIFM). When generating training ideas, consider the elements that make the proposed training necessary and meaningful. Then, during the training itself, address that first. If your audience does not know the WIIFM quickly, they will tune out.

Adult learners are also not content-driven. While content, in general, is undeniably important, most adult learners seek solutions-oriented training to help them instantly connect what they're learning with how they do their jobs. (More information on adult learners can be found at [www.schoolnutrition.org/learningcenter](http://www.schoolnutrition.org/learningcenter).)



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### How Will You Deliver Your Training?

Will your training be a quick and informal 20-minute session on thermometer calibration or a two-hour hands-on demonstration of knife skills and smallwares? Certain topics lend themselves better to one style over another.

For school nutrition learners, long lectures are rarely effective, as participants find it easy to tune out the speaker and tune into personal and professional distractions. To keep engagement high, consider ways to actively draw the audience into the lesson, via games, hands-on demonstrations, round-table discussions or motivational speakers from outside the district. “The hands-on approach—seeing, touching, feeling—helps make it real to them,” reports Powell. She goes on to recommend pairing hard topics, like a lecture on human resources, with something more “fun.”

The school nutrition team in **Jordan (Utah) School District** takes advantage of digitally based trainings available through PublicSchoolWORKS, a provider of school administration software and online safety and regulatory compliance programs. The company’s extensive library of foodservice modules ranges from food safety to cultural sensitivity in schools to violence prevention in schools. “If I had to choose one thing in my career that I believe in and have always stood for, it’s training,” says Jana Cruz, MBA, SNS, director of Nutrition Services.

When Jordan’s electronic training was first implemented several years ago, there was initial pushback, with sufficient time being the most common complaint. In response, the department transitioned to use of an internet-accessible point-of-sale system that allows employees to watch videos from the cashier station computers. “All 500 employees have to watch a certain amount of training,” explains Cruz. “The most positive aspect of this is reaching every employee, and we’ve never done that before.”

**What’s the Point?** *Learning objectives* provide participants with a clear understanding of what to expect from

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1. District-wide formal inservice training is typically scheduled between Christmas and New Year’s.

True  False

2. Professionals Standards training minimums were established by the \_\_\_\_ Act of 2010.

- Hire American  
 Americans With Disabilities  
 Richard B. Russell  
 Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids

3. The minimum training hours vary for directors, managers and other staff.

True  False

4. Training offered in \_\_\_\_-minute increments can be bundled toward the annual minimum.

- 10  
 15  
 20  
 all of the above

5. Analysis of \_\_\_\_ can reveal key areas for employee training.

- staff emails  
 district enrollment data  
 the Administrative Review  
 none of the above

6. Most adult learners would relish a lecture on the history of school nutrition.

True  False

7. PublicSchoolWORKS is a \_\_\_\_.

- lobbying group  
 charter school site  
 teacher’s union  
 none of the above

8. Learning objectives should \_\_\_\_.

- be measurable  
 include strong adjectives  
 be shared at the end of the session  
 all of the above

9. A \_\_\_\_ could be an inexpensive speaker or instructor for employee training sessions.

- school counselor  
 local chef  
 vendor partner  
 all of the above

10. Certifications and other training achievements should be publicized to various stakeholders.

True  False

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To earn 1 Continuing Education Credit (CEU) toward SNA’s Certificate/Credentialing programs for this professional development article (PDA) test, you must achieve a passing score and the issue date (**November 2018**) must not be older than five (5) years from your Certificate/Credentialing period. A maximum of three (3) PDAs per year is allowable for SNA’s Certificate in School Nutrition program. There is no maximum of passing PDAs for those with the SNS Credential, submitted within the three-year period.

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the session; they give the trainer guidance in developing the instruction; plus they establish a measure to determine the success of the completed training. Learning objectives are brief, measurable statements that provide a detailed description of what an attendee will be able to do once instruction has been

completed. A good practice is to share these at the beginning of the session.

Use strong, action verbs when writing your learning objectives: *describe, identify, summarize, solve, prioritize, prepare, predict* are good examples. Avoid less-quantifiable verbs like *understand, appreciate, know, learn about* and

*become aware of.* (Learning Objective: By the end of this article, you will be able to identify components of successful training plans.) You also may want to reference Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (published in 1956 and revised in 2001), which is a primer for expressing learning goals in a manner that reflects cognitive skills: *creating, evaluating, analyzing, applying, understanding and remembering.*

**Plan the Logistics.** *Scheduling, logistics and budgetary considerations* will vary based on all the previous elements of your plan. How many people will participate? Is the training part of the work day or a separate event? Will it be held on campus or offsite? Is it a group activity or a self-paced online course? Do you need an outside speaker or instructor? What's your budget? The answer to this last question can dictate many of the others.

To keep costs low, look to your district—but outside your department—for relevant speakers, such as counselors or human resource specialists. Also, don't be afraid to reach out to the community to find farmers, chefs and restaurateurs who may be interested in sharing their expertise. Vendors also will often help.

### SHOUT IT FROM THE ROOFTOPS

While the idea of training may get a few eye rolls from employees, it is a critical—and required—component for those in school foodservice. And it offers another way to connect with stakeholders. From certifications to community field trips, share your team's accomplishments via social media and other venues to help reinforce that the school nutrition department cares deeply about professional growth. "Nobody really knows what happens behind the serving lines," observes Powell. "If we can do the training and get some recognition...it helps promote that learning is a beneficial and encouraging thing." **SN**

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