

Expert opinion

Brownyard

Training: Your best investment

By John Culotta

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When you started your pest control business, you may have worked alone, treating every home and business and personally greeting every customer. Now, as you've grown from a one-man outfit to one that employs a handful of people or more, it's your employees who are on the front line. Their success or failure reflects on your business and leads to happy or unhappy customers, to referrals or lost business.

With so much on the line, you want to ensure your employees represent you well. And the best way to do that is through appropriate training. Proper training ensures they meet your philosophies and quality standards, and helps prevent accidents and unintentional damage. By teaching your employees the right way to get the job done, you keep customers coming back, increase referrals and prevent often costly losses.

Go beyond technical training

One of the most important segments of effective training pertains to treatments. This ranges from proper chemical mixtures and application amounts to the proper use of equipment. Too much or too little of a chemical can make all the difference in a treatment being effective or causing damage. Not only can customers come after you because a treatment is ineffective or has created damage, but there is also the potential for bodily injury to customers and damage to your business's reputation.

This technical training should be done whether you are hiring an experienced professional or someone new to the business. You want everyone to adhere to your standards, ensuring that they truly reflect the way you do business.

You should also consider training them in proper communications with customers. In today's world, your employees must learn how to properly manage customer expectations. If they are facing a difficult infestation that may take multiple treatments, for example, then they need to communicate that to customers before the first treatment.

If your employees will be driving company vehicles to customer locations, screening and driving training is essential. Make sure you verify their driver's license, do reference and background checks, review their Motor Vehicle Record (MVR) and give them physical, road and written tests. Know who you are putting behind the wheel, and then provide safe driving courses with defensive driving tactics and regular refresher courses.

Ongoing training and resources

After your initial training, don't stop there. Offer refresher courses regularly. Not only does ongoing training help maintain quality standards, but it is a way to keep up on emerging problems and new techniques.

Bed bugs are a perfect example of this need. In the last few years, pest management professionals (PMPs) have had a lot to learn about the

effectiveness of chemical, heat and freezing methods in combating difficult pests like bed bugs.

Some pest control firms offer their own training programs, but there are also many outside educational resources. Training can be done live with an instructor or remotely using DVDs and online courses. The [National Pest Management Association](#) also offers educational opportunities at national and regional events.

However you choose to train your staff -- using internal or external resources, online or live training -- it is most important to ensure you have consistent quality standards, effective orientation and ongoing education. Training is an expense, but it's also an investment in both your employees and the long-term health of your business.

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In the news

Australian study: Business failure rate high because of lack of coverage

At the recent Australian Insurance Summit, StartUpSmart.com.au reports, a study was presented that found about 60% of the country's small businesses are underinsured, and that about 85% go out of business because a claim occurs for which they didn't have coverage. The good news, however, is that after recent flooding put insurance claims in the spotlight, more businesses are re-examining their policies and getting the coverage they need to bounce back after a claim occurs.

From the *pmp* archives

Ongoing training can be your biggest asset

In this July 2001 business column, industry consultant Lloyd Smigel echoes John Culotta's view on how training should be seen as an investment, not an expense.

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