



Your happy

Here, training manager, Fay Gibbin, shares her top tips for training staff and giving them the tools they need to develop and grow – and you the happy and motivated nursery team you need

The importance of training is twofold. It upskills a workforce for companies that are looking to grow, and offers employees empowerment, career progression and financial reward.

With this dual purpose in mind, it's imperative that we take the time to understand the professional needs and desires of each and every employee. With so many roles available, finding what really makes someone tick will help you source the right person for the right position.

1. Understand your goals

For the sole provider and the larger, multiple-site operators, there will clearly be some shared goals. Obviously, every quality nursery must have the right level of qualified practitioners to be viable and comply with the EYFS rules and regulations. However, there is a significant difference between a qualified group of practitioners and a happy and motivated qualified team.

With the early years sector still undergoing a severe shortage in quality practitioners, agency costs are continuing to rise in response to fast-growing demand. Apart from the likely disruption an agency-

practitioner can bring to nursery routines, and the risk of unsettling children and parents, many nursery settings are finding these costs debilitating – not to say prohibitive – and their main business goal is to try and reduce or even eliminate this expense from their monthly outgoings.

This is where effective staff training comes in. For investing in staff training can bring huge benefits to any setting in terms of attracting the brightest apprentice or the most experienced manager and as a way of retaining the very best talent within its team.

2. Choose trainers with talent and mentors with meaning

As Aristotle once said, "Those that know, do. Those that understand, teach." That's why choosing the right teacher for your staff is crucial. As well as having the specific expertise and knowledge in the sector, they also need to have an understanding of your business goals as well as your company culture and ethos.

A good trainer should engage and inspire their learners with their extensive and varied experience and empower them to believe they can take their role to a higher level. What is learned on these courses will help



Modern apprentice, Caitlin Penchion, from Busy Bees Colton Mills – the picture of enthusiasm and motivation

to shape their future and create a desire for lifelong learning.

Initial assessments are a fundamental way of establishing learners' needs from the outset. Not only will they provide you with a firm understanding of what learners expect and require from the course; they can also be used as a reflective benchmark to determine the success of the individual learner's journey.

During these assessments, the learners should be asked to share their future career aspirations, which will provide an indicator of the direction their training should take and form the basis for their individual training strategy. For example, a school leaver wishing to become a room manager within the next five years should focus on managerial observations and plan to enrol on to a managerial course within that time.

3. Get the training environment right

Choosing the right learning environment for your learners is

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motivated team

vital. Learning styles will vary for each person - some may benefit from a theory-based approach and others from more practical, hands-on experience. It is the responsibility of the training team, including the mentor, to ensure that the right approach is taken, and to adapt the programme as necessary. A student who excels at practical tasks may need extra guidance when it comes to written or theory-based work, and would value applied qualifications, such as apprenticeships and interactive workshops.

Personal circumstances and aptitude for learning will vary throughout a learner's educational programme. After all, we all need extra encouragement now and then. To nurture their talent and harness their full potential, you need to have a flexible and responsive training scheme that is in tune with the learner's needs and requirements at that moment in time. It's important to encourage a good rapport between learner and trainer, and learner and mentor. A friendly, trustworthy individual who functions as a soundboard is invaluable when extra support is needed.

On-the-job training is incredibly valuable, as it gives learners the opportunity to gain hands-on experience outside the classroom environment. This type of learning should also be geared specifically towards the role they'll eventually undertake. The work-placed mentor will shadow them throughout the apprenticeship or settling-in programme, giving them support, guidance and constructive feedback along the way. Feedback should be a positive process which shapes their learning journey, highlighting the skills and areas they need to focus on to reach their full potential.

4. Provide a wide range of learning opportunities

A comprehensive training programme should take employees from entry-level through to

management L5, with the option to go on to university to gain a degree. But no one is ever too qualified or too experienced to learn something new, especially in a sector that is constantly moving forwards.

A variety of short courses should be available to all staff covering each and every stage of their development and offering a pathway to specialisms within the sector including; behaviour management, SEND, paediatric first aid and safeguarding. They are designed to offer continuous career progression within the childcare sector and are important to include as part of any training strategy if you are to maintain knowledgeable, longstanding teams of staff.

Continuous upskilling will support all children and their families with any needs they may have, helping every child to reach their full potential. To ensure this level of support, regular training and easy access to guidance should be available. The guidelines and best practice for offering children with additional learning requirements need to be regularly updated and specialist staff are required to stay abreast of any significant changes or progress.

To ensure staff are up to date with the latest regulations and advice, refresher training should be carried out annually and practitioners should have access to local authority training.

5. Incentivise your workforce

"Job training empowers people to realise their dreams and improve their lives." Sylvia Mathews Burwell



Dylis Wells from Busy Bees Longridge gets stuck in

By continuing to invest in your people throughout their career, you are acknowledging the value they bring to your company and you are laying the foundations for a loyal, longstanding workforce.

Measuring and acknowledging success and celebrating individual achievements at nursery, across the company and with their peers and parents is extremely important. Not only does this reward the learner, it will hopefully inspire and motivate like-minded colleagues to follow suit.

Training should be a life-long commitment. Upskilling an existing workforce is as important as hiring new recruits, and championing higher level apprenticeships ensures the long-term success of a training programme. An ongoing personal development programme that extends beyond the completion of the apprenticeship through short courses, additional qualifications or a higher-level apprenticeship ensures not only a continuously upskilled workforce but a happy and motivated one. ■

- Fay Gibbin is the training manager at Busy Bees Training, which offers apprenticeships and training programmes in the early years sector in line with their commitment to 'growing your own'. As well as training professionals in external nursery settings, the company also upskills and increases the talent pool for its sister company, Busy Bees Childcare.

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