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Employee Training and Development in Traffic Control for Road Construction

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Abstract

This project focused on defining each of the hourly positions for a company that specializes in Traffic Control for road construction and gave them official job titles. A comprehensive list of expectations and responsibilities for each position, based on the level of experience in that position, was developed to complement each job title. With these job descriptions, a progression pathway was created for an employee to see what skills they need to acquire and master in order to progress and gain promotions. Additionally, a list of training benchmarks for the employee and supervisor to utilize as a roadmap for advancement was produced. Training and development of a workforce are critical to achieving lasting success, increasing profits, efficient production, lowering turnover, and reducing liability (Mozael, 2015) (Herzberg, 1968). It also increases job satisfaction and fulfillment (Singh & Jain, 2013).

Keywords: Training, Development, Emotional Intelligence, Innovative Thinking, Creative Problem Solving.

Introduction

Through years of watching employees complain about the lack of direction and competent training for the jobs they were performing, it inspired me to create a list of expectations and responsibilities for the roles of Flagger, Lead Flagger, Setup, and Traffic Control Supervisor. My personal experience of being employed in each of these roles helped fuel my desire to create a guiding framework for future employees to more successfully navigate the necessary skills and knowledge of professional Traffic Control personnel. My promotion into a management position inside the office inspired me to make a personal and professional goal to increase the pride and professionalism within the Flagger role. This was a foundational experience that helped me realize this goal of creating titles and job descriptions.

My first step in creating these documents was to outline the primary function of each employment role and give that role a title that was accurate and also professional, as well as create new roles to more accurately reflect the responsibilities and tenure of an employee. These titles and roles were transformed into Certified Flagger, Lead Certified Flagger, Sr Lead Certified Flagger, Traffic Control Supervisor (Flagger), Traffic Control Setup, Lead Traffic Control Setup, Traffic Control Technician, and Traffic Control Supervisor. The next step was brainstorming all the possible responsibilities and expectations for each of the titles and organizing them into experienced based tiers. A list of knowledge and skills was then compiled to be used as benchmarks for any employee in each role to master as they progressed because some skills and knowledge must be mastered before the next level can be acquired. Along the way, some of my previous efforts at integrating more professionalism into the roles and the training sessions that I had created were revisited. Finally, everything was assembled into a set of expectations and responsibilities for each title, based on the skills, knowledge, and experience that each level required, and the training benchmarks were integrated to create the guiding framework for advancement.

Innovative Approach, Emotional Intelligence, Creative Thinking, and Innovative Solution

Early in my Traffic Control career, it was evident that others had complaints about the lack of training, the non-existent ladder of progression and advancement, and shared the pessimistic viewpoint that one would never be able to get anywhere within this company unless something changed. I decided to start asking questions, observing others, doing some research, and trying to get to the root of why things were the way they were.

Through this lens of perspective-taking, I was able to train my attention on some key factors. There was a general lack of professionalism and pride in this field. There was little to no follow-up or additional training and development of employees once the Flagger Certification was obtained. There was an enormous lack of knowledge about the fundamental requirements of Traffic Control, especially within the lower ranks. Everything about the daily tasks and expectations of employees was entirely subjective to the person supervising that workforce. And there was a minuscule amount of faith and goodwill towards these employees. To begin solving these problems, I needed to holistically analyze them. These problems were part of a larger system. If these individual problems were going to be solved, I needed to address the entire system as well.

The default approach to combat these problems up to this point was to throw out wage increases. This approach did not actually solve any problems at all. I conducted informal interviews with my coworkers through daily interactions and listened to their responses, paying special attention to their emotional responses and non-verbal cues. This allowed me to decipher the essence of their individual issues and proposed solutions and categorize them into common themes. As often as possible, I gave them my summarized feedback within these common themes to ensure the clarity of my own thought processes.

Along the way, I earned a promotion into an office position supervising a large workforce. From this perspective, I was able to employ dialectical thinking to the common themes and gained new insights into how to begin to make changes. I narrowed my approach down to two main components: training and morale. Through critical and abstract thinking, I was able to create an integrative problem statement that encompassed both these components and more. My new approach to solving these problems was: How might I more efficiently and effectively train and develop employees while boosting productivity, safety, and morale? With this new and innovative approach in hand, I created job titles with clear descriptions of

expectations, skills, and knowledge, which integrated training and development into a framework of progression and advancement.

Results

The impact of this work was initially measured by whether or not these titles and job descriptions would be added into company policy by my employer, and if we would apply this framework to current and future employees. A larger scale impact was whether or not this framework would be adopted by other Traffic Control companies, affecting the entire Traffic Control community in this region as a whole. I also measured impact through the feedback that I received from my peers and supervisor.

Many stakeholders will benefit from this project. I benefit from developing this project by increasing my value as an employee. I am a better supervisor and leader because I have applied my improved skills and knowledge in areas like empathy, perspective-taking, critical thinking, understanding of Traffic Control, time management, innovative thinking, creative problem-solving, and self-awareness. The current and future employees benefit by increasing their own skills and knowledge, having a goal to work toward with steps laid out for them on how to achieve that goal, and increased job satisfaction through a clearly defined job description (Singh & Jain, 2013). These benefits enable them to see a pathway that allows them to make a successful career out of this work (Herzberg, 1968). The managers and supervisors benefit from this project by having a better trained and happier workforce, which makes their job much more manageable (Karim et al, 2019). The company that employs all of us benefits through lower turnover and higher recidivism, which lowers its operating costs. They also benefit through more efficient production and execution of services, which increases their profit. The contract owners and roadway authorities that govern the roads we work on benefit through peace of mind and trust that our worksites are set up correctly and safely. This leads them to seek us out for future

work and further improves the company's profitability. Additionally, the contractors who hire us to provide Traffic Control services benefit in much the same way, which improves the company's image and reputation, leading to job security for all the employees of the company. The company, contract owners and road authorities, and contractors each benefit as well by having a workforce that is knowledgeable and safe which limits their liability and exposure to accidents and workplace injuries.

When this project was presented to my peer supervisors, it actually inspired them to start creating their own versions of improved new-hire orientations, creating a new and improved culture, and setting new standards for safety and operations within each of their respective departments (Karim et al, 2019). My supervisor abandoned the old approach of throwing more money at employees as a solution to low morale and worked with me to create a more sustainable and equitable pay structure based on merit and skill level.

Conclusion

I anticipated that one or more of the current supervisors would be apprehensive about the impact that this work would, or even could, have on the workforce. However, this anticipation was not fully realized and, to my surprise, all of my peer supervisors began their own creative and innovative process as stated earlier.

One thing about this work that I might change or do differently is to seek out expert feedback and collaboration earlier in the process. This will expedite the process of creating comprehensive responsibilities and expectations and ensure that potential issues are brought to light and resolved promptly (Farooq & Khan, 2011).

This project is a marriage of innovative thinking, creative problem-solving, and Emotional Intelligence. The development of this project will elevate the culture of Traffic Control.

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