

TIPS FOR ORIENTATION OF A NEW EMPLOYEE

Sterile Services Departments nationwide daily face the challenge of orientating new employees to unfamiliar equipment and tasks. Often Sterile Services Technicians jobs are an entry-level position that requires little or no previous hospital experience. Many new employees are therefore, unfamiliar with the Sterile Services setting. Classroom presentations are useful in the process of educating Sterile Services beginners, but coaching provides the most effective means of enabling new employees to attain their full potential. Coaching differs from teaching in that coaching requires active participation by both the coach and the learner. New employees are both fearful of appearing incompetent and eager to prove themselves in their new position. Therefore, many new employees feel threatened with managers as their coaches. Experienced peers are in the best position to coach. However, expertise in Sterile Services job skills and extensive knowledge of material management do not guarantee successful coaches. Employees need to be trained to be effective coaches. This will assist you by identifying obstacles to learning and the steps of the coaching process, and by pointing out some of the principles of adult learning.

OBSTACLES TO LEARNING

Coaching will not eliminate the obstacles to learning, but a good coach needs to be aware of these obstacles and recognise signs of them in new employees. By being sensitive to these barriers, coaches have the power to lessen their negative impact and promote positive learning.

Four common obstacles to learning are:

1. Fear of appearing incompetent
2. Fear of job loss
3. Fear of the unknown
4. Fear of being unable to learn

1. **Fear of appearing incompetent:** As mentioned previously, new employees are in a quandary. They are both eager to prove themselves competent and afraid of appearing incompetent. Some new employees may not have had successful learning experiences in the past. They may have been placed in frightening and embarrassing 'learning' situations where they did not know answers and lost face in front of others whose respect they valued. Be aware that the new employee you are preparing to coach may be bringing these kinds of experiences along to the job. Create successful learning experiences early to reinforce the positive aspects of the learning situation and boost self-esteem.
2. **Fear of job loss:** Closely related to the fear of appearing incompetent is the fear of job loss. New employees realise that if they do not perform well they will lose their jobs. Coupled with the need to care for their homes and families, the fear of job loss can create great stress and anxiety, minimizing their ability to concentrate and learn. They need reassurance that sufficient time and assistance will be given to allow mastery of expected skills.
3. **Fear of the unknown:** Do you remember your first day in the Sterile Services Department? Unfamiliar faces, unfamiliar surroundings, unfamiliar equipment and unfamiliar tasks greeted you. The Sterile Services Department is a big unknown for the new employee and can be a very frightening and intimidating place. This may result in the learner being anxious and distracted. Orientating new employees to their new surroundings, introducing them to other employees, informing them of your expectations and giving them an overview of what to expect during their orientation period and

3. **continued:** and coaching sessions will help alleviate this fear and facilitate learning.

4. **Fear of being unable to learn:** Some of the employees you will coach will have been away from the learning environment for a long time. Perhaps they were not particularly successful academically and they may be fearful that they cannot learn. Again, structuring the the orientation program so that they will succeed early during this period will help put this fear to rest. The fear of being unable to learn may also manifest in the older adult as a fear of being too old to learn. While it is unfounded, this fear is nonetheless very real to those who hold it. Older adults may have some special needs that should be addressed, however. Reaction time, speed of learning, visual acuity and hearing decline with age. These obstacles can be overcome in a variety of ways, such as, using visual aids with large print, allowing extra time to learn as needed and speaking clearly enough for the employee to hear you. Once perceptrors are aware of the obstacles to learning, they may be more effective in implementing the seven steps of the training process.

Steps of the coaching process

1. Preparing to train
 2. Identifying what the learner already knows
 3. Explaining the procedure
 4. Demonstrating the procedure
 5. Watching the learner perform the procedure
 6. Evaluating the learners performance
 7. Following up.
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1. **Preparing to coach:** When new Sterile Services employees begin employment in the department, you expect them to study and to work hard at learning. Likewise, you must study and do your homework, in preparation for orientating