

Training—A Key to Quality

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INTRODUCTION

The whole emphasis of producing, selling and distributing nursery stock today is on quality. Unfortunately, quality does not come cheap. It normally implies more input, more attention to detail, more knowledge of what to do, more uniformity of materials and procedures, more organisation, more communication, more commitment, more participation—in short more skill and professionalism. The implication of all this is that more training is required, which in turn requires careful planning. The steps necessary are:

- 1) Set quality goals.
- 2) Identify and devise methods for meeting these goals and draw up a plan.
- 3) Implement the methods.
- 4) Monitor performance against the plan.

1) Setting Quality Goals. Normally this takes the form of an appraisal of what you are currently doing and how it can be improved; often a reaction to customer criticisms, past problems and failures.

A recent and highly significant development in setting quality standards is the British Standard B S 5750 Quality Assurance. This standard will become increasingly important in the years ahead. It will almost certainly have E.E.C. connotations. Already some of the supermarket chains and Local Authorities are insisting that their suppliers have B.S. 5750. It will not be too long before landscape contractors, garden centre operators and an increasing number of nurserymen adopt a similar approach. Adoption of B.S. 5750 by any company implies the need to consider quality in all its aspects, and in all aspects of the business. It is likely to lead to a far more radical approach towards quality than the traditional methods.

2) Identify and devise Methods, and Draw Up Plan. In practice a method or procedure is often identified first (e.g. the use of “intermediate” pots to increase the size and branch structure of a container plant). This will then need careful planning into the whole operation so that it integrates well.

3) Implementation of Methods, Procedures and Plan. This stage is where the real work of training and retraining will take place. It is vital that this phase is set in context with the others if it is to be really effective.

4) Monitoring of Performance. This is always essential, not only to ensure the whole operation works as it should but also to throw up unforeseen problems and difficulties which result in the need for appropriate reaction-replanning, retraining, etc.

OVERALL STAFF TRAINING PROGRAMME

As will be obvious, individuals' requirements will vary according to their position and role within the organisation. Notcutts' approach to this is set out in the table below (Table 1). We regard this as the blueprint for our staff development training programme as detailed in Table 2.

Table 1. Categories in staff development plan

Career position	Staff for develop	Training	Probable duration	Experience	Qualification	Aspiring to
New entrant	School leaver returner	SEE STAFF DEVELOPMENT TRAINING PROGRAMME	1-3 yrs	Full range work areas	NVQ Level I/II	Nursery person
Nursery person	Reach job competence		2-3 yrs	Full range to specialise	NVQ Level II III?	Leading-hand
Leading-hand	Skilled experienced		2-3 yrs	General supervisory specialized	NVQ Level III crops	Charge-hand
Charge-hand	Experienced Leading-hand		3 yrs +	Supervisory Planning work based projects	NVQ Level III IV?	Assistant Manager
Asst Manager	Asst Man showing extra ability		3 yrs +	General management within department	NVQ III or IV	Manager
Manager	Highly competent with ambition		5 yrs +	As above + external training	NVQ IV or V External qualif	Senior Management

Table 2. Staff development training programme

NEW ENTRANT	
Induction including quality awareness	- in house
Notcutts craft skills	- in house
College training	- college
Other skills training, e.g. first aid, safety awareness, F E P A	- in house/L A T B ¹
NVQ Level I (II)	
City and Guilds 1 (2)	
(some proficiency tests)	
NURSERY PERSON (ENTRANT)	
Continued skills training	- in house/L A T B
College training	- college
Showing people how (Instructional techniques)	- L A T B
Quality awareness	- in house
Introduction to supervision	- in house
NVQ Level II F E P A	
Craftsperson	
LEADING HAND	
Effective supervision 'A'	- L A T B
Health and safety at work	- L A T B
Extra skills training	- in house/L A T B
Quality assurance	- in house (external)
(Coaching/counselling)	- in house
('S' Series)	- M T C ²
First aid	- St Johns or similar
NVQ Level III ³	
Craftsperson	
F E P A	
CHARGE HAND	
Effective supervision 'B'	- M T C
Work planning	- L A T B
Quality supervision	- M T C
Instructional techniques	- L A T B
('S' Series)	- M T C
Extra skills training	- in house/others
Coaching/counselling	- in house
Assertiveness- M T C /L A T B	
ASSISTANT MANAGER	
Effective manager 'A'	- M T C
('S' Series)	- M T C
Manager support skills	
- assertiveness	- M T C /
- managing stress	- L A T B /
- negotiation etc	- other external training
Quality management	- M T C
Counselling/coaching/mentoring	- in house
Extra skills training	- in house/others
NVQ Level III IV ³	
MANAGER	
Effective manager 'B'	- M T C
Quality management/control	- in house/others
Selection interviewing	- L A T B
Staff development/appraisal	- L A T B / others
Staff coaching/counselling	- L A T B / others
Mentoring	- in house
Extra skills training	- external
NVQ Level IV V ³	

¹ L A T B = Local Agricultural Training Board² M T C = Management Training Centre (A T B)³ At the time of writing NVQ levels III and IV had not been fixed - hence ?

The objectives of this programme are to produce a knowledgeable, skillful individual who is able to cope adequately and without excessive stress into his or her appointed role.

MANAGEMENT TRAINING

The training programme by management is reasonably uniform across departments. As is usual, most managers of departments have tended to specialise for a varying period in the particular crops in their charge and have acquired considerable experience of the special needs of the crop. Despite this most managers could switch from one crop to another and after a settling in period would perform equally as well.

TRAINING REQUIREMENTS WITHIN DEPARTMENTS

At departmental level the particular skills required to carry out the work of the department come into focus. It is advisable, if not essential, to carry out a skills analysis of the department. This is normally done by listing the operations which take place and considering the various aspects of each operation and whether a training schedule is required for it to be carried out efficiently. After consultation with the staff, set procedures are drawn up for each task and these form the basis of the training schedules. Staff can then be assessed individually for their competence in the various activities and any shortcomings be picked up in a training session, either "on" or "off" the workplace.

APPRENTICES

In the main, apprentices are the first stage in an on-going procedure to staff the nursery with a high proportion of thoroughly and broadly based well trained and skilled staff, upon which our future depends. The most able apprentices provide the management of the future, but many provide skilled craftsmen and supervisors vital to the effective operation of the departments. Notcutts' apprenticeship lasts three years and incorporates a blend of: working in all the nursery departments on a planned programme of work experience, informal on-job training; formal training on the nursery, and formal training off the nursery (e.g. knapsack spraying, tractor driving etc) and college training. At the completion of the apprenticeship the objective is that each apprentice will hold five proficiency test passes—carrying a craftspersons qualification and N.V.Q. to at least level two. Each trainee begins with a comprehensive 3-day induction course to introduce them to the industry and to Notcutts.

TRAINING AND QUALITY

Implementation of an integrated training programme properly planned should ensure high levels of skill, uniformity of working procedures, flexibility of approach, with the ability to quickly take on new procedures. All these attributes in the workforce mean any changes decided upon as a result of adopting B.S. 5750 or similar, and carrying out the procedures previously discussed, should be quickly assimilated by the whole staff.