

Upskilling and Reskilling Your Workforce

Written by: Dr. Nanette Miner, Leadership Development and Workplace-Learning Strategy Consultant, The Training Doctor

There has been a lot of chatter in the popular press lately about “upskilling” and “reskilling” your employees for the future.

Upskilling involves giving your employees capabilities they didn’t have when they first came to work for you or first filled a role. Remember when we all started using computers at our jobs? They changed the way we worked but didn’t really change the work we were doing. Your accounts payable person progressed from the manual labor of using an adding machine, to using a calculator, and finally to using a computer program - but the output of the job, paying the bills, never changed.

Reskilling, on the other hand, does involve learning new skills to do an entirely different job. This is an especially smart “future-proofing” maneuver in many companies, because you are able to keep a loyal employee who understands your company’s values and culture and move them into a different role. Reskilling is often necessary because a job becomes obsolete due to advances in technology (I remember when I was a child – we had a gentleman come to our house with a divining rod to help determine the best location for our new septic tank!). For many years, construction has required many individuals and specialties, but in the very near future we will be regularly [printing 3-D buildings](#) which means the construction worker of the future will need entirely different skills.

Because technology, globalization, and efficiencies are changing so rapidly these days, you cannot afford to ignore the need to upskill and reskill your employees. The reality is –



there won’t be enough people available in the “open market” who have the skills of the future, which means you won’t be able to simply hire-on people with the skills you’ll need. Every employer is going to have to invest in upskilling and reskilling their employees.

This is not an issue you can deal with “down the road;” the sooner you begin to look at ways to enhance your worker’s capabilities, the better. An immediate added benefit to the organization is that providing upskilling also improves employee retention. The Building Talent Foundation (focused on homebuilders) conducted a workforce engagement study at the end of 2021 and determined that, “The top reason survey respondents gave for staying in their jobs was that they had opportunities for career advancement, training, and learning new skills.”

Here are a few tips to help you tackle the challenge:

Resources

One of the questions I often get asked from potential clients is “Do I have to start a training department?” The answer is no. Providing training and delivering training are entirely different. You must be the provider, but you can use all sorts of resources to be the deliverer.

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

The number one mission of all professional associations is to educate their members, therefore, the first place to look for assistance is to your professional association. For example, CMAA offers webinars, eLearning, conferences, and in-person workshops. ASCE offers free PDH, specialty certificates, exam prep, and customized group training taught by subject matter experts.

LOCAL COLLEGES OR UNIVERSITIES

Many colleges, especially community or technical colleges, will bring their offerings to you and oftentimes customize the curriculum to meet your specific needs. This would be useful for topics such as finance or project management. Additionally, these institutions generally have a “workforce development” division which is solely dedicated to upskilling the local workforce. For example, in North Carolina, Wake Tech Community College has recently completed its [Hendrick Center for Automotive Excellence](#) to teach the most advanced mechanical and collision repair techniques.

Additionally, many colleges are now focusing on certificate programs, which can be completed in 18 months or less, rather than on full-blown degree programs. This greatly reduces the costs of attending college and the learning is more hands-on than theoretical. (On a side note – if you like to give back to the profession, these programs are always in need of instructors with current, real-world experience.)


COLLABORATION

Although the industry lends itself to competition by requiring companies to compete and outbid their peers to get contracts, in the case of employee development, collaboration is a

smarter route. Your organization is not the only one that needs skilled employees, so why go it alone? Work with other firms in your area (or even regionally and nationally) to provide the upskilling needed. Case in point: the Building Talent Foundation (BTF) was formed in 2019 by 20 residential construction companies in the U.S., to improve “talent supply, training, and retention.”

You might ask your local [CMAA Chapter](#) or chamber of commerce to host and promote the learning and any construction company in the area could send their workers. The space, materials, and facilitator costs would be borne equally. Or, if you have a staff member who can dedicate their time to planning and running this kind of offering, you might be the sponsor and invite other firms to your event for a fee. This would not only ensure that all of the offerings occurred on your schedule, but it would also elevate your reputation in the industry as being “the forward-thinking and proactive firm” among your competitors.

For any of these approaches, one critical success factor is that you allow people time to learn on the job. You should not expect employees to spend their personal time upskilling or reskilling for your benefit. One organization we work with allows four hours per week of learning and study time so long as the employee is enrolled in an approved program (e.g., their manager has approved the course and the company is paying for it). This might look like the employee leaving early on Tuesdays and Thursdays to attend a class locally, retreating to a local coffee shop in order to take an online class, or simply closing their door for an hour each day so they can concentrate on coursework.

The most important take away from this article is – don’t delay! The construction industry is evolving rapidly and dedicating time and resources to upskilling and reskilling your employees is an investment in your organization’s ongoing success. 



About the Author

Dr. Nanette Miner is a leadership development and workplace-learning strategy consultant. Through her firm, [The Training Doctor](#), she has revolutionized the way that individuals are prepared for leadership roles in their organizations. Rather than a chosen few, her process is aimed at ensuring everyone in the company has the skills and business acumen of a leader. This approach ensures both immediate and long-term return-on-investment (ROI) for an organization.

She has written articles for *Chief Learning Office magazine*, *Forbes*, and *MBA World* and is a frequent guest on workplace training and career podcasts and talk radio such as *Inc. Radio* and *America's Workforce Radio*.

Nanette regularly speaks at industry conferences and corporate learning events on how to integrate leadership capabilities throughout an organization. An author of eight books, her most recent is *Future-Proofing Your Organization*.

Any views and opinions expressed in this article may or may not reflect the views and opinions of the Construction Management Association of America (CMAA). By publishing this piece, CMAA is not expressing endorsement of the individual, the article, or their association, organization, or company.