Training Across Cultures in the Workplace – Train the Trainer

Technologies that allow employees and organizations to collaborate virtually has exposed the cultural differences gap in the workplace. As a result, there is a need for cross-cultural training programs. These programs aim to brief employees on what to expect when working with those of other cultural backgrounds, how to work through differences, and maximize the benefits of cultural teams.

WHAT IS CROSS-CULTURAL TRAINING?

CROSS-CULTURAL TRAINING (CCT) refers to a procedure or practice that aims to enable learners to develop the awareness, knowledge and skills required to be culturally competent in cross-cultural situations, domestically and abroad. The three pillars of successful CCT are:

- It is key to remain aware of unconscious biases that influence us as a result of our own culture. Doing so allows employees to recognize that cultural differences are present, and is therefore the first step in managing these differences.
- It’s important to understand the notion of culture, its basic features, and how it affects human behavior. Gaining new knowledge about other cultures helps us to counter stereotypes and understand cultural motivations and behaviors.
- Key skills to developing cultural intelligence include: interpersonal skills, tolerance for uncertainty, empathy, discernment and adaptability.

WHY IS CROSS-CULTURAL TRAINING IMPORTANT

Different cultures approach the workplace in different ways, and the resulting cultural gap can leave employees feeling frustrated or stressed if there’s a lack of sensitivity to cultural norms. Taking the time to help colleagues understand each other makes all the difference in setting expectations and building a rapport among employees from different cultures.

TIPS FOR MAXIMIZNG THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CCT

Observation techniques

- How are ideas presented? Pay attention to tone, body language and metaphors.
- How are decisions made, in or out of official settings?
- Look for congruence or inconsistency between what people say and what they do.

Ask Questions

- Ask questions about things that seem to be common sense. Assumptions are how most misunderstandings happen.
- Ask questions more than once. Make questioning a normal part of interactions.
- Ask for specific examples of positive and negative interactions. In the answer, listen for clues about:
    - Employer-employee relations.
    - How conflict is addressed in this setting (e.g., directly, indirectly).
    - Expectations and understandings of safety.
    - The priority of safety in relation to other company priorities.

Be Prepared and Proactive

- Be prepared to have your assumptions questioned.
- Make sure colleagues feel comfortable communicating with you about cultural differences.
- Be aware that power dynamics can impede communication and may take time and concerted effort to overcome.

TAKEAWAY

Cultural training will become increasingly important as the global economy grows and diversifies. Safety professionals who develop the ability to work effectively in cross-cultural settings will be better positioned to promote workers health, safety and well-being in the increasingly global economy.