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# Technical Article

Technical Article Content Pulled from the NIBA Belt Line Newsletter

## Changes in Training: The Coming Exponential Shift to a Knowledge Economy

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Today it takes more than a firm handshake and a tool box to be a sales and service conveyor belt distributor. Customers require an ever-higher degree of expertise in the distributor they select to supply, install, splice, and maintain those thousands of miles of conveyor belt in service today.

Considering how conveyor belt ratings are increasing and how skill-intensive working on them has become, it's easy to see how the demand for knowledgeable, well-trained technicians has skyrocketed. Fortunately, NIBA offers a wide range of training seminars on various segments covering everything from belt selection/operation and splicing to system troubleshooting.

While intensive training doesn't guarantee success, ongoing training for all your team members certainly increases the odds in your favor. In fact, NIBA has experienced dramatic growth in training school enrollment and has graduated a record number of students each year. In order to keep abreast of ever- new technologies and changes in the industry, the NIBA Education/Technical Committee members work together to provide a comprehensive class curriculum.

Training is about the transfer of knowledge. The key is that for training to add value to your organization, techniques and information learned in the classroom must be applied successfully in the workplace. To select those programs best suited for your organization, you must learn how to analyze current needs and determine the real causes for the deficiencies; design, develop, and implement solutions; and evaluate the results with performance in mind.

To maintain and expand operations within the marketplace, firms are broadening the base of investment to focus on human capital in addition to the more concrete investments of capital equipment and facilities. The company that recognizes the true value of each employee and makes that crucial investment will reap the reward in enhanced productivity and a more defined competitive edge.

Evaluate the current training plan being implemented in your organization. Is it handled in-house or outsourced? Is it the old training method of "just watch me"? Although this has worked well in the past, chances are that this approach may not engage the younger video-game-raised workforce. Companies who limit



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themselves to this approach may look 60 days down the road and realize they cannot grow without making a paradigm shift to include more formalized, user-friendly skill development. With the “graying” of America’s workforce, how many times have you heard someone say “if I could only find some good help?” The real question becomes what will you do once you find those “keeper” people to make sure they learn and retain the training you are giving them?

To be more specific, statistics show that in the next ten years approximately 40 percent of the current North American workforce will reach retirement age. One of the major impediments to organization effectiveness is the loss of momentum and expertise when talented employees leave—physically or psychologically. The bottom line is that talent is precious. And the price for not paying attention is high.

To improve individual and organizational achievement, explore the training options available through NIBA and its member companies. Get a fresh perspective on how to train your people. Implement what you learn and your company will function more effectively. Create a vision, and turn that change into tremendous opportunity.

Exponential change is happening across the globe, throughout our workplaces, and inside virtually every other industry. Technological advances, globalization, intense competitive pressures within the marketplace, and corporate restructuring have changed the ways in which firms produce and market goods and services. Within an increasingly complex and international marketplace is a growing emphasis within North American firms on increasing worker productivity, cutting production costs, and improving on-time delivery of the highest quality goods and services. Firms are increasingly emphasizing responsive customer service at every level of the organization—from the field splicer to the customer service representative to the company president.

The transformation to a knowledge-based economy, driven by and coupled with megatrends, such as the Internet, globalization, branding, consolidation, and outsourcing is creating a fertile environment for industry-based training programs. Companies that embrace this knowledge-based economy contrast dramatically with those locked in an attitude of “that’s how we have always done it” and the accompanying inability to meet the needs and expectations of clients. A willingness to implement new approaches to enhance existing operations provides “innovative” companies with open-ended opportunities for growth, now and in the foreseeable future.

The introduction of new technologies and production processes requires manufacturing firms to make investments in job-specific training of management and shop personnel (e.g., on how to use new equipment and processes). In some instances, it is important to be aware that as skills and competencies required within the workplace become more demanding, it is also necessary to address basic skills deficiencies through more generalized training, often before job-specific skills training can be effectively provided.

The first step is often the most difficult. Begin by taking advantage of educational resources available in the NIBA community and learn what courses and outside education activities are worthwhile. Using existing training opportunities frees staff time lost to planning and implementing an in-house training program and the fees for such training may be cost-effective for many companies.



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When considering training courses, keep these points in mind.

- **Good facilities create a positive learning environment.** Local hotels or conference centers can offer better opportunities for the employee to concentrate when away from work. The conference facilities also provide all the amenities to make employees feel the training is important: good facilities, audio-visual equipment, and even refreshments add subliminal positive messages that the employee and the training are important and valuable.
- **Instructors who understand the subject and learning styles are essential.** If possible, observe the Instructors in action before they are hired, and if that is not possible, speak with someone who has seen them teach. Always check instructors' references. The wrong instructors—incompetent trainers or those who speak in academic language not suited to the employees—can wreck the best-planned training program. If employees are not accustomed to sitting for long periods in a classroom, the first classroom sessions should be brief. Otherwise, employees will become bored and disinterested. Instructors who are comfortable enough with the subject matter to tailor it to the needs and learning styles of a particular class produce the best take-aways that will be applied back in the workplace. Finally, be sure the instructors understand the valuable rule: Lessen the lecture and increase the learning! An instructor who begins by saying “I have too much content to cover in too little time!” stalls learning before the session begins.
- **Self-esteem development is critical to success in training.** Some talented and intelligent people have a poor self-concept, which impedes their willingness and ability to learn. Positive reinforcement by the instructors and the employers helps boost learning.
- **Class materials in an easy reference format are crucial.** This is especially important if employees are not accustomed to taking classroom notes. By providing three-ring binders with training handouts and detailed charts and instructions, companies can ensure that employees have materials to easily refer to after the training.

NIBA seminars enjoy a rich tradition of hosting educational sessions that offer not only an opportunity to enhance knowledge but will perhaps initiate lifelong contacts and relationships with others in our industry. It is our hope that every time you or a member of your team participate in a NIBA training session you will leave more informed, and that your time at these sessions measures up to your expectations. Our commitment: we will do everything we can to make that happen.