Training and development

Helping your people learn and share skills makes your business stronger. It doesn’t have to be expensive. Learning on the job can be as valuable as courses and qualifications.

Create a culture that values learning:

- tailor learning to employee and business goals
- pay attention to how people prefer to learn
- have a skills development policy or plan
- develop people of all ages, backgrounds and experiences.

Why learning is important

Businesses that value learning are in a better position to survive and thrive. All employees benefit from continuing to learn — young and older, new starters and experienced employees.

Benefits include:

- workers better able to do their jobs and adapt to change
- engaged and motivated workers
- less chance valued staff will leave
- easier to delegate and get the results you want
- option to fill job vacancies with an existing worker, saving time and money on recruitment
- makes you an attractive employer, when you need to hire
- protects against knowledge and skills leaving your business when key staff retire or move on.

Encourage employees to share skills and knowledge.

It can be motivating for all people, no matter where they are in their career.

Coaching and mentoring

Learning and development doesn’t have to be expensive, or mean time off from business as usual. Picking up skills and knowledge through coaching and mentoring on the job can be as effective.

Ways to do it

**A coaching mindset**

Day-to-day work is full of opportunities to learn. Focus on the positive. Ask people why they think something worked or didn’t. Show team members how to give constructive feedback and coach colleagues in their areas they’re good at, eg customer service, a piece of software or equipment. Sharing knowledge can help all experience levels and age groups feel valued.

**Tell stories**

It’s how we have passed on knowledge since the beginning of time. Encourage it informally, eg during breaks, while tidying up, or closing down for the day. Share your experiences — a narrowly dodged problem, a project you’re proud of and why. Tap into what long-standing team members know. Equally, learn from your new people who can bring new ideas.

**Make it OK to get things wrong**

Mistakes — ours and others’ — are rich in learning. Learning from real life, familiar experiences from your business can be easier to relate to than hypothetical situations from workshops or courses.

**Solve problems together**
Team up to find solutions and new ideas. Staff will learn by observing different thought processes and hearing others’ experiences. It can strengthen working relationships. Plus mixing different viewpoints, eg older and younger, customer facing and behind the scenes, often leads to stronger ideas.

**Job shadowing**

This can be useful for people keen to grow into another role. Or when employees would benefit from understanding what’s involved in another job or task — for an example, check out the job shadow case study on this page.

**Buddy system**

Pair people of different ages and experiences, eg an employee experienced in delegating and challenging ideas with a less experienced, less assertive member of staff. When teaming people, be clear what you want each person to get out of it. Pay careful attention to personality types — avoid pairing people who might clash or annoy each other.

**Involve employees**

Talk about learning and feedback openly and often. A team talk is a good option, but also give people a chance to speak just with you or a trusted colleague. Take time to answer questions, give and receive feedback and discuss learning goals.

[How to communicate and give feedback](/business-performance/management-and-leadership/how-to-communicate-and-give-feedback/)

**Case study**

**Job shadow pays off**

Nico’s top bricklayer Reece is starting to feel the effects of 40 years in the trade — his back aches constantly. Reece worries about doing permanent damage. Nico doesn’t want to lose such a valued employee. Reece has been the heart and soul of his building firm. The knowledge he holds is invaluable.

Dana, a competent administrator and bookkeeper in her 20s, works in the office. She’s been with the business for two years and wants to take on more responsibility. Nico senses Dana is bored. He worries she may also leave.

Like most business owners, Nico is pulled in many directions. He can’t afford to lose staff. Besides, he needs another person who knows how to cost jobs to ease his load.

After talking to a trades manager friend, Nico decides combining Dana and Reece’s skills could solve his employee/workload issue. Reece has worked on hundreds of building projects. He knows the supplies needed to complete a job, without waste. Reece isn’t great with spreadsheets, but Dana is.

Nico talks to Reece and Dana. He asks if they’re interested in taking on costing work. Together, they figure out a job shadowing plan.

Dana starts spending a couple of days a week on site with Reece. Reece shares stories about past projects, and Dana observes how things are done on the job. Another two days a week, Reece comes into the office with Dana to learn computer skills.

In time, Nico feels confident delegating costing work to Dana and Reece. Reece’s back is grateful for less time on the tools. Dana feels more motivated. Plus Reece’s ‘don’t sweat the small stuff’ approach helps her put some of the customer service stuff she finds stressful into perspective.

[Managing age-diverse workers](/hiring-and-managing/managing-people-day-to-day/managing-age-diverse-workers/)

**For training on common topics, eg health and safety, consider splitting costs with other local businesses.**

**Formal training**

Sometimes outside expertise is needed to upskill employees.

Options include:
Online courses and webinars — a cost-effective way to introduce new ideas and approaches. Useful when you need to train staff across different locations.

- Off-the-shelf training courses — one-size-fits-all courses run by training companies.
- Tailored training — a trainer adapts a course to suit your business needs.
- Conferences, seminars and workshops.
- Courses run by polytechnics or other tertiary education providers.
- Literacy training — government-funded courses to help with reading, numeracy and communication.

Workplace literacy (external link) — Skills Highway


**Self-assessment: Skills in your business**

To survive and thrive, your business needs the right skills and knowledge at the right time.

Take this assessment to spot any skills gaps and opportunities.

Start now (hiring-and-managing/getting-the-best-from-people/assess-skills-in-your-business/)

**Learning and skills development policy**

Workers of all ages benefit from continuing to learn. And it’s good for your business.

Tailor a policy to suit your people and your goals — plus get tips along the way.

Create a policy (https://wpb.business.govt.nz/workplacepolicybuilder/learningAndSkillsDevelopment/whyWeHaveThisPolicyLearning)

Create a policy and plan

Having something in writing shows employees you are committed to their development. It helps people understand what’s available, what’s expected, and how they will be supported.

It’s important staff know about your policy or plan. Be sure it’s put into practice — don’t just write one and file it away.

Your learning and development policy might include:

- types of learning you encourage, eg job shadowing, mentoring, diplomas, webinars, workshops
- how to apply or flag something is wanted or needed
- how you will support employees to learn and use new skills and knowledge
- how any costs /time off work will be handled
- how learning should tie to people’s roles, eg build existing skills, help people stretch into new areas
- expectations on how knowledge will be shared with the team.

**Equal opportunities**

Be fair when deciding who gets learning opportunities, especially if it’s to prepare someone for a new role or to handle poor performance. Offer the same stretch and learning opportunities to new employees and current employees who move into new roles.

Check if stereotypes affect your decisions. Do you develop workers of all ages? Or, for example, do you mainly train people who are starting out?

The Human Rights Act says you can’t make employment decisions based on age, race, gender or other personal characteristics. All employees benefit from continuing to learn, regardless of age, background and experience.

Clear criteria, fair decisions (hiring-and-managing/managing-people-day-to-day/managing-age-diverse-workers/#e-22462)
How people learn

As people’s personalities differ, so do their learning preferences. Ask your employees how they best take in and retain information. Common styles include:

- learning by doing
- looking at infographics or watching videos
- preferring to hear new information
- reading instructions or background info, and writing notes
- getting information in chunks over time.

Few people learn effectively from being presented to, without the chance to ask questions. It might save you time in the short term, but will likely take longer to get everyone on board and up to speed.

Be prepared for questions — this is to allow time for problem-solving and drawing on past knowledge and experience.

It’s a good idea to use real situations to help people learn new skills, systems or knowledge. Encourage your employees to share examples from their work, e.g. a common task or a customer’s unusual request. Explore together how to solve problems or complete tasks.

Gently check in to see how confident employees feel with new information or skills. People can be embarrassed to admit they haven’t grasped something. For example, an older worker may not want to admit they don’t understand a piece of software, thinking it’s down to their age, when it’s not. A younger worker may be sheepish about finding the same software tricky, thinking a ‘digital native’ should find it easy.

Case study

Changing training to suit employees

Early childhood manager Ika wants to try a new teaching approach at his centre. He books a trainer to run two half-day workshops. He splits the cost with a neighbouring childcare centre, also keen on the philosophy.

A week after the first workshop, Ika hasn’t observed any teachers using the approach. Deflated, he asks staff why. The teachers admit they found the information a lot to take in at once. They had little chance to ask questions. They also struggled to see how they might use the principles with the tamariki at their centre.

Ika cancels the second workshop. Instead, the trainer visits the centres to show teachers the technique one on one.

The trainer helps staff apply the approach to real situations. She leaves posters and checklists as visual prompts. Reading material is also available for those who need more background. In a follow-up session, she asks teachers what they are finding difficult and helps them retry.

A month on, Ika is happy to see his employees have mastered the teaching technique. When a student teacher starts work, they eagerly pass on what they have learned.

Picking up new skills and knowledge is motivating to all ages, backgrounds and experiences.

Developing your people helps keep them engaged.

Avoid common mistakes

- Assuming learning just means formal courses and qualifications — learning on the job can be just as valuable.
- Thinking time off billable work will be bad for business — helping your people learn, and share their skills with each other, will make everyone’s job easier.
- Only investing in people early in their career — people of all ages and life stages benefit from ongoing learning.
- Not letting your people have a say in what they learn — encourage employees to help identify any skill gaps or offer up their expertise to others.
- Not letting employees have a say in how they prefer to learn — people pick up information in different ways. Few people learn by being talked at.
- Believing learning is only about employees getting better at their jobs — offering a variety of stretch opportunities makes you a desirable employer. It can help you keep hold of valued workers and attract
strong candidates when hiring.

**How helpful was this information?**

- [ ] 1 Star
- [ ] 2 Star
- [ ] 3 Star
- [ ] 4 Star
- [ ] 5 Star

"Rate this" is required

Additional comments

Submit

Loading...

**Related content**


See what's available

**Business planning advice**


Whether you’re growing fast or new to business, expert advice can kick-start your planning.


Learn more

**Test if you’re ready to grow**

[How to grow/growth-and-innovation/test-if-you-are-ready-to-grow/#e137](/how-to-grow/growth-and-innovation/test-if-you-are-ready-to-grow/#e137)

Are you and your business ripe to expand? Take our self-assessment test and find out.

[How to grow/growth-and-innovation/test-if-you-are-ready-to-grow/#e137](/how-to-grow/growth-and-innovation/test-if-you-are-ready-to-grow/#e137)

Get started
[How to grow/growth-and-innovation/test-if-you-are-ready-to-grow/#e137](/how-to-grow/growth-and-innovation/test-if-you-are-ready-to-grow/#e137)

**Tips for great health and safety talks**


Check it out

**Training staff to handle complaints**


Tools and tips to help your staff know when to take action themselves, and when to call in someone more senior.
