

Invest in Training for Staff, Shopper Satisfaction

By Joanni Miller, NCG

Successful small businesses see their future defined more by what their employees will need to know going forward than merely by what they need to know right now. A commitment to learning on the part of cooperative business leaders is a critical aspect for retaining great employees and keeping them engaged.

Many co-ops and other retailers face high staff turnover, and we all know that this is expensive—both in actual costs involved in the recruitment and hiring process and in hidden costs such as the time it takes for a new employee to become fully productive in their role. Beyond the costs related to a specific position, the inconsistency caused by high levels of employee turnover can also have a negative impact on customers as well as on the morale of staff who stay.

Co-ops aren't alone in experiencing high turnover and the resulting concerns over retention and engagement. Many researchers have studied engagement over the past few decades. A clear result of the research is recognition that one important way to keep employees engaged is to support their ongoing development. Some of the benefits of this focus on development and training are:

- Employees feel valued when an employer invests in their ongoing learning, and this often results in a desire to give more to the organization.
- Engaged employees are also more likely to invest themselves in their work, align their efforts to the goals of the organization, and broaden their efforts over time to help their employer reach success.
- Employee confidence in one's ability to meet or exceed job expectations increases job satisfaction.

All of these help to create an attractive environment for recruiting employees as well as retaining and engaging existing employees.

E-Learning: cost-effective, on demand

National Co+op Grocers (NCG) has long supported co-ops with staff training and development through webinars, written materials, and in-person events. Today, NCG is committed to providing an additional development method, one that is flexible and available on-demand and that offers some of the interactions of a classroom via a computer screen. This method is e-learning.

In an ideal training environment, co-op staff would have access to development resources when they need them, not only during annual in-person events. E-learning allows people to work at their own pace, at a time that is convenient to them. In addition, the time and dollar costs of traveling to an in-person event are eliminated. The e-learning platform provides multiple people with access to the same standardized content, allowing for creation of a common language and greater impact throughout the organization.

NCG courses are offered to its members for no cost beyond the \$20 annual Co+op U license fee. A number of e-learning courses are already available through NCG's learning management

system, Co+op U. Courses cover topics ranging from using Excel, building displays, creating marketing strategies, understanding co-op ownership, the basics of category management, and more. Co+op U also allows co-ops to access video and written content as well as to register for in-person trainings and events. In 2017, NCG plans to add courses on margin management, understanding financial indicators, and the start of a series on supervision. As the Co+op U library grows, it is our hope that co-ops' ability to retain and engage co-op employees will grow as well."

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