

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

By *Trudy Thomas, MSc, MRPharmS*

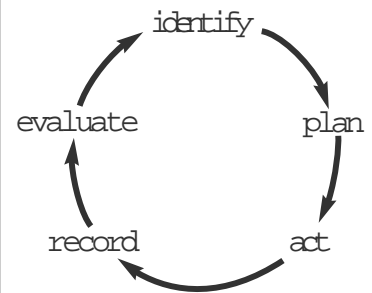
Renowned business man John Harvey Jones says "Everything in business is achieved with or through people . . . only with well trained staff as a business asset can we take on the best (of the competition) and win".¹ This article looks at how to develop your staff through training



identify gaps in your knowledge

1. What are the professional requirements for training your staff?
2. List three skills needed to be a good trainer.
3. What organisations can be contacted to help train your staff?

This article relates to the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's core competencies of "principles of staff development and training" and "training skills" (see "Medicines, ethics and practice — a guide for pharmacists", number 25, July 2001, p104). You should consider how it will be of value to your practice.



Because professional requirements dictate that the pharmacist is responsible for the standard of work produced by certain staff, many pharmacists find themselves responsible for staff management and training. Training is a process by which an individual gains new skills or knowledge, improves existing skills or develops new attitudes. It benefits the individual worker (eg, increases job satisfaction, increases status and sometimes there is a commensurate salary increase) and the organisation for which that person works (eg, greater productivity and profitability). However, many pharmacists perceive training as time consuming and costly, and report that staff are resistant to training. There is also a fear that once staff are trained they will leave for better jobs. Nevertheless evidence has shown that well-trained staff are likely to work harder, produce work of a higher quality than previously and be more adaptable. Training is also associated with a decrease in absenteeism and staff turnover.

TRAINING, COACHING AND MENTORING

The task of developing an individual is never-ending. Training is not a one-off exercise, nor can it be done to people or for people. The individual must want to acquire new skills, and/or improve current ones, for training to be successful. Therein, one starts to appreciate that managing the development of others within a business environment is something of an art. It is an art not acquired by osmosis, nor is it something that is likely to have been covered in pharmacy degrees. Being a good trainer is a skill that the pharmacist learns over time and with hard work. However, there are undoubted benefits for the trainer as well as the trainee. In his book 'The tao of coaching', Max Landsberg says that investing 10 minutes each day in coaching creates 20 minutes extra time for the coach. Pharmacists may not be in a position to go home 20 minutes earlier, but they could use the saved time for producing work of a higher quality — how many of us can honestly say that we always spend as much time as we would like with a patient? Landsberg also proposes that effective trainers have better communication skills, greater support from colleagues and more fun.²

Coaching is a training method defined as the process by which an experienced instructor works with an individual on a one-to-one basis, in a way that allows him or her to discover the answers for himself or herself. Questioning techniques are often used to achieve this. Coaching can involve demonstrations or imitation. It is usually informal, and the person being coached is intimately involved in the learning process. The coach is on hand to guide and there are plenty of opportunities to ask questions. Sessions can range from a few minutes *ad hoc* to a longer, planned session away from the job.

Another term widely used in training is mentoring. A coach focuses on the trainee's ability to perform specific tasks, but a mentor has a wider role. The mentor usually has a long-standing relationship with the trainee and is prepared to act as counsellor on a broad range of topics, which can extend beyond the workplace. It is possible for pharmacists to take on both coaching and mentoring roles during their careers. Despite the debate in training circles as to the precise difference between the roles of trainer, coach and mentor, it is beyond the scope of this article to analyse these terms in depth. In this article, I have used the more general term of trainer to encompass all the possible roles a pharmacist may undertake in developing others.

TRAINING OPTIONS

There is a variety of training methods, including lecturing, group learning, computer-based training and independent learning. In the pharmacy setting it is likely that pharmacists will be involved in either coaching or supporting individuals who are learning independently (eg, distance learning courses and day release study). Trainees will have different preferences for the way in which learning is delivered. You have probably noticed that some people learn best though trying things for themselves, others prefer to watch a demonstration, some people learn best from reading and making notes, and others like to consider previous experience and apply it to current practice. Research has identified four distinct learning types: activists, pragmatists, reflectors and theorists (*PJ*, 14 July 2001, pp53–4), and questionnaires can be used to identify which group an individual belongs to. Being aware of a person's preferred style and tailoring training to that style will help the training hit the mark quicker. You also need to be aware of your own preferred learning style when training others. If you feel like you are not getting something across to a member of staff, it may be that you have identified a difference in learning styles and something you need to address.

Mrs Thomas was a training officer at the National Pharmaceutical Association for five years and wrote its medicines counter assistant's programme, 'Pharmacy interact'. She is now a part-time prescribing advisor for Swale PCT, a locum community pharmacist and a CPPE tutor

Off-the-job training courses have the advantage of allowing (in theory) stress-free learning away from the workplace, but suitability will depend on whether or not you can spare the trainee for a whole day or more. National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) combine off- and on-the-job learning. For both these types of training, your role is to provide support by ensuring that the training meets the needs of the trainee and the organisation (preferably before a course is started) and that the new knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired are assimilated into the workplace. It should not be assumed that motivation and feedback given by course providers are sufficient for the trainee. Support at work is crucial to the success of such programmes.

THE SKILLS NEEDED

Whatever method of training is chosen, for it to be effective, the trainer needs special skills such as time management. It is not just about being an expert and imparting factual knowledge. Stimulating interest, gaining commitment, and encouraging application through practice are of prime importance. Trainers also need to be able to:

- 1 Identify learning needs
- 1 Plan a training programme and set targets for learning
- 1 Deliver or support the learning process
- 1 Match training style and pace to suit the learner
- 1 Encourage, motivate and provide feedback
- 1 Identify directions for future learning

Identifying needs A starting point for initial training could be to look at the role of the individual within the workplace and produce a checklist for the functions that he or she should be able to perform. Training needs can be influenced by an outside body. For example, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society requires that all staff whose work regularly involves the sale of medicines must have completed an

accredited training course or be undertaking such a course. Training needs are easily identified when new equipment or working methods are introduced, but typically, needs are identified when something goes wrong. This can be more difficult to manage because many people view a request by management for them to undertake training as a punishment for poor performance. Pharmacists should dispel such myths by stressing that additional training is actually an investment by the employer in the individual — a compliment not a criticism.

In a good learning environment training is the norm and is on the agenda from day one in the organisation, for everyone, including the most senior staff. In this situation, learning needs can be regularly assessed by both trainee and trainer.

Planning and target setting Once a learning need has been identified, you and your trainee need to plan how best to meet it. For mandatory training, such as that required for medicines counter staff, this involves contacting either the College of Pharmacy Practice or another appropriate body for the list of accredited Medicines Counter Assistant courses. Most hospitals will already have a chosen training programme and trainees can be enrolled on courses as appropriate (see Panel 1 for organisations that provide training and details of nationally recognised qualifications). For non-mandatory training, there are endless opportunities, from a five-minute read of an article in the pharmaceutical press to enrolment on various programmes.

Once a programme is identified as suitable for the needs of a trainee (and the business), the trainer and trainee should discuss how the training will be managed. Timetables and specific targets can be negotiated. Targets should be achievable in order to keep all those involved focused and motivated. They should be demanding enough to stretch the trainee and avoid misplaced overconfidence, but not so demanding that the trainee is discouraged by failure and self-doubt. Study time must be planned and ring-fenced. Ideally this should be paid time at work. Many pharmacy staff like to take train-

PANEL 1: CURRENT REQUIREMENTS, QUALIFICATIONS AND CONTACTS

CURRENT REQUIREMENTS FOR STAFF TRAINING

- 1 **Medicines counter staff** Medicines counter staff must be trained in any standard operating procedures or protocols governing the sales of medicines in the pharmacy. They must complete a product training course accredited by the College of Pharmacy Practice on behalf of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society. Courses currently accredited are Boots Healthcare Assistants Course, Buttercups Medicines Counter Assistant Course, Cambridge Counterpart Pharmacy Assistant, Lloyd-pharmacy Medicine Counter Assistant Training Programme, Moss Medicine Counter Assistant Course, NPA Pharmacy Interact and Tesco Stores Counter Assistant Course.
- 1 **Dispensing technicians** There is currently no set requirement for dispensing technicians, although requirements are likely to be introduced in the next two to three years. Details are as yet undecided. Hospital appointments usually require (or train to) BTEC or NVQ Level 3 Pharmacy Services.

QUALIFICATIONS

- 1 **National Vocational Qualifications** NVQs (or their Scottish equivalents SVQs) are competence based and consist of a series of performance standards. These standards are descriptions of what should be done in the workplace through actions, behaviours and knowledge. NVQ standards are divided into units (which are recognised qualifications in themselves) and are available at five levels. The level relates to the responsibility and duties that the individual may need to carry out, including the supervision of other people's work. Level 3 involves more responsibility than Level 2. All NVQ candidates compile a portfolio of evidence which documents performance of the standards. Evidence can include assessor's observations, statements by customers, and photographs. There are no exams as such.

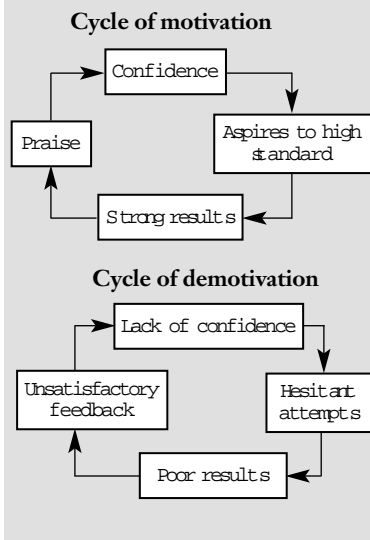
NVQs such as the Level 3 Pharmacy Services may be supported by a more traditional training programme which provides the underpinning knowledge for the standards. NVQs can be awarded by independent examining bodies like the Business and Technology Education Council-EdExcel (BTEC-EdExcel) and City and Guilds. For more information on NVQs, visit www.dfes.gov.uk/nvq.

- 1 **BTEC-EdExcel courses** BTEC courses are also vocational. They are especially designed for people who work or want to work as technicians. Qualifications can be gained at three levels, first, national (considered to be equivalent to two A-levels) and higher national diplomas (HND). Modules in the programme for pharmacy technicians include pharmacy practice, compounding and sterile dispensing. Technicians usually attend courses on day release, one day per week.

CONTACTS FOR PHARMACY STAFF TRAINING PROGRAMMES

- 1 College of Pharmacy Practice 024 7669 2400 (for details of accredited medicines counter assistant training courses)
 - 1 National Pharmaceutical Association (training department) 01727 832161 (training for medicines counter assistants and dispensing technicians' NVQs)
 - 1 City and Guilds 020 7294 2468 (awarding body for NVQ courses for dispensing technicians)*
 - 1 Edexcel 0870 240 9800 (awarding body for BTEC Higher National Certificate in Dispensing)*
 - 1 National Prescribing Centre 0151 794 8135 (for pharmacists and technicians)
 - 1 Royal Pharmaceutical Society 020 7572 2410 (general training inquiries)
 - 1 Welsh Centre for Pharmacy Postgraduate Education 029 2087 4784 (training for pharmacy support staff in Wales)
- *Courses are provided by local education colleges

PANEL 2: MOTIVATION AND DEMOTIVATION CYCLES



ing materials home. This is acceptable if it suits the trainee, but no member of staff should be made to feel they always have to undertake training at home because no time is allocated during working hours. Time also needs to be built in for the trainee and trainer to meet regularly to discuss progress.

Matching style and pace to suit the learner I have already touched on the importance of matching training to individual learning styles. If a demonstration is appropriate, it should be carefully planned where possible, so that trainers are clear

in their own minds what it is they are trying to teach. The whole task can be explained first, then broken down into steps, explaining what is being done and why. Questions should be encouraged during the demonstration. The trainee's understanding needs to be checked at the end of a demonstration but in a non-threatening way, so as to avoid causing embarrassment if a mistake is made. You can warn trainees that they might not get it right first time. You can build rapport with trainees by talking about personal experiences of carrying out the task or similar tasks. Not every demonstration, however, has to be so formal. Good product training involves the trainee having an intimate knowledge of the product in question. This means time to look at the product, handle it, smell it and even try it if appropriate. The pharmacist can be on hand for any questions that may arise.

Encouraging, motivating and providing feedback Belief in the abilities of trainees is the trainer's greatest weapon. People are more likely to achieve an objective if there is an expectation from above that they will. It is important for trainers to discover what motivates their trainees. The benefits of a challenge can be described to trainees to appeal to their motivation. Trainers need to be able to influence trainee confidence in order to move them through the cycle of motivation (See Panel 2).

When people first try a new skill or working practice, they may have a lot of confidence in their ability to perform the task, but if they find the task difficult, performance may deteriorate and confidence decreases. The good trainer should expect this temporary dip in performance and keep trainees motivated and their confidence high. With practice, a gradual improvement in ability and confidence will follow. It is tempting to relieve a trainee of a task because he or she appears to be struggling. This does not develop the skill in the trainee, lands the task back with someone possibly overqualified to do it and may well demotivate the learner.

Another point to bear in mind is that adult learners often lack confidence. They may underestimate their own abilities and be over anxious about making mistakes. They might not wish to try things for fear of looking foolish or failing. Adult learners want and deserve to be treated with the respect that their adult status demands. They want no harsh criticism, nor to be humiliated or patronised. Most adults will bring skills from other areas of their lives and a perceptive trainer can build on these.

Insightful feedback is an important tool in the trainer's toolkit. Giving feedback involves discussing with trainees what they did in a particular circumstance and the impact their actions had. Feedback should be led by the trainee (through skillful questioning from the trainer) and should be positive and constructive ie, reinforce why or how the trainee did a good job then ask what the trainee might do (even) better next time.

action : practice points

1. The requirements for the training of pharmacy support staff may go through some changes in view of current developments in pharmacy. Read the Society's consultation paper on the regulation of pharmacy support staff (PJ, 27 June, pp888-90) and think about your answers to the questions on p890. How might the proposals affect you?
2. Spend a few minutes observing your trainee, perhaps during the sale of a medicine. When the trainee is free, ask him or her if they would like some feedback on the sale and write down how you and the trainee both felt after this feedback.
3. Assess the training materials available for your staff (eg, training packages and journals) and encourage learning by ensuring that selected materials are available to them. Disseminate information by pointing out articles from the pharmaceutical press and discussing them.

evaluate

How could your learning have been more effective?
What will you do now and how will this be achieved?

Identifying directions for future learning Training should be assessed at several stages, but especially when the plan is complete to see if additional learning needs have been identified. It is important to look to the future. What are the options for career progression once an individual's needs have been met successfully?

Records of training It is good practice for all staff to keep records of their training. This is not simply a file full of course certificates. Records should include details of each stage of the learning cycle: identifying needs, planning, action and reflection. Over time these records, if maintained, will provide evidence that the member of staff is taking part in continuing professional development. You can support this by providing the necessary materials and a place for your staff to keep these.

CONCLUSION

Many pharmacists fear training. They are worried they will appear to be ignorant or that the trainee will not like them any more. But pharmacists have good communication and people skills that allow them to be natural trainers. Certainly most pharmacists are enthusiastic enough about their subject to motivate others. If a pharmacist has doubts about a training role, he or she could speak to an experienced trainer. Training is hard work, but it brings huge rewards for trainer and trainee alike. Moreover, helping others learn is the most powerful method of developing oneself: pharmacists who want to be good trainers have to practise what they preach and undertake plenty of training themselves.

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FURTHER READING

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