# Winning the Talent War With Training

As the old saying goes, "time is money." It can be invested or wasted, and whether you're wasting hours or dollars, the outcome is often the same: less business and more costly problems overall.

Yet, while many businesses keep track of their money, no one is generally tasked with watching time!

If they did, many companies might discover their technicians and service managers unavoidably waste hundreds of man-hours each week dealing with what ought to be avoidable issues that grow and spread into other parts of the business.

First, employee morale and energy sink. With this dynamic in place, turnover increases. Customers grow impatient and reviews suffer. Technician turnover surges. Your already tired team of technicians begins to burn out.

Your entire company feels the effect. Problems that could have been averted early on now require more time and money to resolve.

The professionals closest to these troubles undoubtedly know that many of these things can be traced back to the competence of their teams and the quality of their training.

Better-trained techs make repairs faster and get the job done right the first time, increasing efficiency and productivity. Less-stressed techs who feel that their employer is invested in them are happier in their jobs, making it less likely they'll leave – and happier techs often make for happier customers.

## Skilled Technicians Impact the Company Brand

The demeanor and performance of technicians has an incredible impact on how customers view a company. Highly trained techs handle repairs more quickly and tend to get the job done right the first time.

Positive customer experiences are often reflected in reviews, increasing demand and enhancing your brand. Competent and customer-focused technicians also earn companies higher scores on customer surveys that measure their customers' experience and the speed of the repairs.

## Skilled Technicians Impact the Bottom Line

Business owners rely heavily on service managers and technicians to accurately diagnose the cause of equipment or system failures and pinpoint the component that's causing a problem – the first time around. But when technicians aren't invested in early on, and given the resources they need to develop both the knowledge and cognitive skills they need to troubleshoot more effectively, business profits can take a hit due to an increase in callbacks.

Callbacks can cost a business money in a number of ways. You've got truck operation costs, materials needed to fix the problem stemming from the initial service call, and the loss of a chargeable call a technician is missing because they are out on a no-cost call. Fortunately, an investment of time and money in training can pay for itself very quickly by reducing the amount of callbacks per technician, positively impacting a business's bottom line.

# Three Ways Virtual Training Helps You Attract and Keep the Best and Brightest

## 1 Tap into a new pool of candidates – no experience required

A shortage of experienced technicians means managers need to expand their hiring pool to entry-level technicians or apprentices. Traditionally these "green new hires" learn skills by shadowing a seasoned technician on-the-job. This makes training newbies part of a more seasoned technicians' regular job description — a task they are expected to perform alongside handling various work orders.

One-on-one training is further complicated by the "two-shoulder" problem. Oftentimes, work orders are often conducted in tight spaces with poor lighting and it can be almost impossible for the trainee to get a clear view and understanding of what the mentor is doing during the repair.

Virtual training solves these problems by giving entry level techs a "hands-on," first-person experience. This simulation training also helps them understand the why of the repair process, not just the how.

In addition, the training is self-directed and autonomous. So, not only are new techs receiving best-in class training, they're getting up to speed quickly without becoming a drag on fellow technicians.

Taken together, these advantages enable you to overcome the biggest disadvantage of hiring inexperienced technicians and allow you to tap into a pipeline of new recruits.

## 2 Attract Millennials by adapting to changing expectations

Formal training gives companies the edge in attracting talent. Not just any training will do, however.

Today, even skilled tradespeople expect to be trained using technology. And that doesn't mean just watching a talking head read PowerPoint slides. They want training that's interactive, intuitive, and entertaining.

The demand for sophisticated digital training is only going to increase. Millennials – already the largest working generation in America – expect immersive training that keeps them engaged by turning learning into a game. The generation coming up behind them, even more.

If you're leaning toward implementing VR as part of your immersion, know that recall increases to a full 90% because of how life-like the learning is.

## 3 Give your experienced techs a formal path for advancement

When the labor market is tight, companies refrain from promoting from within for fear of leaving onsite operations further understaffed. While that can make sense in the short term, it's a risky move. Techs that are ready for promotion may be lured away by other companies promising higher-level positions, higher pay, and more opportunity for growth.

This is why companies must enhance the employee experience through formal training, upskilling, and opportunities for advancement. Without an ongoing focus on promotion pathing and overall career betterment, techs may decide to move to a company that does.

### *By The Numbers*

**89% of Interplay Learning customers say that Interplay Learning gave them the ability to train techs faster than before.**

## If Training is the Silver Bullet, Why Isn't Everyone Doing It?

Quite simply, implementing an effective training program takes an investment of time. Managers often resist giving their employees more training because they recognize they're already understaffed, burning out, or overworked.

They believe their technicians don't have the time to take training each week in addition to their regular workload. They worry that forcing training on their technicians will lead to more work for the techs, more complaints from customers, and more headaches for staff in other departments.

This is why leadership support in prioritizing training is critical.

## Creating a Training-Friendly Culture is Key

A formal training program can solve many problems, but only when implemented correctly. Leadership must be fully committed and excited to support learning.

They recognize that training positively impacts engagement, productivity, and the bottom line by enabling techs to complete repairs quickly and get them right the first time. The result is more work order completions, less outside vendor contracting, and happier customers.

Investing in people is also important for succession planning. The more companies promote employees from within, the less they need to hire externally. Technicians themselves also know they don't have to leave to get promoted and make more money. Finally, better entry-level training means you don't have to hesitate when thinking about promoting from within.

**95% of Interplay Learning customers have seen a positive impact on their business since they began using our training.**

## The keys to creating a training friendly culture include:

- Make training a part of your technicians' job tasks by entering training into your work order system or setting aside specific times during the day to complete training. If you leave training to the technician's discretion, it won't get done as incoming work orders will take priority.

- Don't make technicians choose between getting their work done or doing their training. That only leads to more stress and makes it harder for them to retain the training they do take.

- Talk-up training. If you provide training without being excited about it, the perceived value is reduced, and it becomes about compliance, not a valued investment in employees. To get the full benefit, it's important to convey—both verbally and in writing—to technicians that, "We are doing this because we want to invest in you personally. We want you to be happy in your job, to feel more confident in your abilities, to get promoted, and to feel good about working here."

- Manage expectations. It's important to understand that there may be a short-term dip in performance while the training is ramping up. While techs may have to cut one work order on the days they train, investing this time upfront is preferable to taking the time and attention of a senior tech every day for several months—time that ends up being wasted if technicians continue to leave at the current industry turnover rate.

- The full benefit of training doesn't happen overnight. It comes after a sustained, consistent effort. Leadership expects their team to be autonomous and excited about learning. But to be successful, a training-friendly culture must be supported, encouraged, and enforced up and down the management chain.

## Tips for Encouraging and Incentivizing Training:

- Set aside 30 minutes for training at the beginning of a shift, before the day gets too busy.

- Enter training time into your work order system, so techs take the training instead of completing a work order during that time.

- Tie completion of training to bonuses and promotions, or give gift cards or other small rewards for reaching training milestones.

- Recognize top finishers publicly and in meetings.

- Have regular conversations with techs about the training. Did they complete their hours? Make sure it's top of mind.

- Conduct quarterly check-ups focused on a path to promotion. What does the tech need to do to be positioned for advancement?

## Conclusion

Hiring and retention has always been a huge challenge for business owners – and the bad news is that it will only get worse. There will always be a shortage of skilled trades workers. But when it comes to attracting and retaining technicians, you must decide between being proactive versus reactive, between growth and inertia.

Whether you use training to get entry-level techs up-to-speed more quickly, upskill experienced techs to keep them sharp or provide opportunities for professional advancement, offering virtual training – and creating a culture that encourages its use – can be transformative to your business and to the lives of your workers.

**For more information, contact Interplay Learning today.**

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