Teaching Tips

Several individuals have recently inquired about teaching methods and techniques for the wall and ceiling industry. There are certain necessities to successful instruction: a strong knowledge of the industry, a desire to stay abreast of changes and developments in the trade and a positive attitude toward teaching. However, the teaching itself is where many find themselves needing assistance. To this end, I've presented information about the instructor, characteristics of good instructors, understanding students, identifying instructional content, designing curriculum and preparing for instruction, and supervising on-the-job training. Some of this material was drawn from W. R. Miller's "Instructors and Their Jobs." This is an excellent reference and should be an addition to all vocational-technical education libraries.

The Instructor
Teaching and learning are ongoing processes. However, without instructors who are fully competent in their subject and the teaching process, no educational or industrial training program can be completely successful. The key to the learning and teaching process is the instructor. The instructor must be technically proficient and personally committed to the outcome. These two factors plus professionalism provide a balance required for effective instruction.

Instructors in school, apprenticeship and industrial training programs must manage people with a wide range of skills, abilities and personalities. Teaching is a complex task requiring insight, introspection and decision making during every class session. Having said that, people become teachers for many different reasons. Most people that choose to teach the trade respond well to challenges and are proud of what they do for a living. Their belief in the industry becomes a major part of their reasons for teaching.

Characteristics Of Good Instructors
Wall and ceiling instructors provide a mechanism for sustaining industry standards and quality workmanship by developing the knowledge, skills and abilities of future trade workers. To that end, successful instructors must have a solid, healthy and productive relationship with students. Most of the credit for this success goes to the teacher's knowledge of students as human beings, and of the needs, drives and desires they continually try to satisfy through teaching. Although all the characteristics of good instructors can not be included, some examples are provided:

- Be professional—the professional teacher is sincere, straightforward and honest.

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• Accept all students—a good instructor understands where students are in the learning process, including their faults and problems.
• Teachers are role models—the actions and safety practices both during instruction and on the job have a critical effect on the students’ behavior.
• Keep up with trends related to the industry—professional journals, periodicals, technical reports and other sources offer valuable information that good teachers can use when developing curriculum and instruction.
• Attempt to carefully analyze personality—a good teacher identifies with the thinking and abilities of each student; no two students are alike.
• Continuously evaluate performance—a good teacher understands the effectiveness and the standard of learning achieved by the students.
• Display the right attitude—the manner in which teachers develop their instruction contribute to the impression (positive or negative) students have about the instructor.

Keep in mind, good teachers come in all sizes and shapes and act in a variety of different ways. Most teachers, especially those teaching occupational subject matter, were not chosen because they were already good teachers. They were chosen because they demonstrated something that indicated that they could become good teachers. They have the required background, intelligence, discipline and, most importantly, the moral character that teachers must have to inspire students.

Occupational instructors need to understand that different individuals learn differently.

Understanding Students
Occupational instructors need to understand that different individuals learn differently. This is especially true in the multicultural wall and ceiling industry. Although many new apprentices of the trade are intelligent, they may have different strengths and combinations of intelligences that can be stifled or enhanced through their training and...
instruction. Keep in mind, students learn because they want to learn. While some students learn in spite of the instruction they receive, reasons they learn and the methods by which they learn are varied. Therefore, an understanding how students learn is particularly important.

For the student, careful planning and preparation on the instructor’s part, in addition to skilled presentation, are necessary for success. Learning is an active process by the student. Factors that impact learning depend upon the readiness, motivation, life experiences, application of what is being taught, understanding and knowledge of what is expected, repetition, age, intelligence, sex, handicaps, learning disadvantages and more. Simply, teachers must create a climate for learning and understand student rates of learning vary. Some recommendations include keeping students motivated and informed, approaching students as individuals, giving credit when due, criticizing positively, being consistent and admitting errors.

**Identifying Instructional Content**
A teacher of any occupation, in order to be effective and to realistically present what occurs on the job, has to have some actual work experience. Conversely, occupational experience alone is not enough to make a good teacher. For a variety of reasons, teachers need work experience as well as informal and formal education both in the occupation and in teaching methods. Still, knowing how to teach and what to teach is the question.

The first and most difficult task of any teacher is determining how to organize course materials. Following are some ideas on how to manage curriculum materials:

- Define the goals and objectives of your instruction.
- Ask other instructors, administrators or others if there are approved curriculum materials.
- Talk with other instructors who

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teach similar disciplines (much of the curriculum could already be in place, and with a few modifications to the content, effective lesson plans could be developed).

• **Contact** the State Department of Education (they may have insight and recommendations about approved curriculum materials).

• **Research.** Use library materials, professional publications and organizations related to the occupation; all offer excellent resources.

• **Seek** information from bureaus and associations related to the trade (there are many talented individuals that have been in similar situations).

Considering this, once a teacher has established the content that they want to teach, it is recommended that they start with a basic framework for the course. It is relatively easy to develop a more complete course guide once the components are in place.

**Designing Curriculum and Preparing for Instruction**

Contractors must adhere to the plans for building their structure. They must consider the equipment needs, estimate cost of building materials and labor, and know the processes and systems needed to be effective. Similarly, instructors must adhere to plans for building their curriculum. They must consider the material needs, cost of developing the curriculum and estimate the desired duration of time for effective instruction.

Designing an instructional plan and preparing for instruction requires a total curriculum. The preparation involves the individual course curricula, units of instruction and lesson plans that encompass accurate goals, objectives and identified competencies for successful student achievement. Additionally, any curriculum must align with local, state and national standards as they relate to the wall and ceiling industry. The essential elements of an effective educational program are as follows.

• Relationship of the course to the entire educational program.
• Objectives of the course.
• Needs of the student.
• Content to be taught.
• Equipment and facilities available.
• Appropriate methods of instruction.
• Student learning activities.
• Resource materials, procedures and instruments for evaluation.

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TRAINING

Keep in mind, effective instructors do not leave course organization up to the student. Providing an organization plan helps students keep course materials together and facilitates preparation of assigned activities and preparation for examinations. Moreover, it should be understood that there are no universal formats for designing instruction and learning packages. Still, the well-prepared instructor will provide opportunities for the learner to apply principles, concepts and skills to the objectives of the course, as established.

Supervising On-The-Job Training

On-the-job training is simply job shadowing by an instructor as a student works through desired tasks. However, to be effective, the application process of a student’s performance on the job is enforced by formal instruction. To illustrate, a plastering instructor might give a brief lecture, then practically demonstrate the process and procedures of how to scratch, brown and color coat a structure. The application (hands-on) aspect of the basic principles required on the job is more easily simulated by students if they know the correct terminology and procedure associated with the outcome. While it is more difficult to simulate actual working conditions, it provides a valid example of the process and ensures quality of workmanship.

On-the-job training in many work situations is a continuous process. Changes in workforce conditions, work tasks, products, etc. make it a permanent part of an instructor’s activities. In most cases, the instructor has the final word for the success of a student, although others can share the responsibility of on-the-job training.

For successful, effective, and economical on-the-job training to occur without interfering with the production of work, the instructor should consider the following.

- Provide opportunities for real-life learning experiences. Give less experienced personnel responsibility under the guidance of a skilled worker. This will provide a more versatile work force and establish organizational teamwork.
- Use dead time for instructional programs (before work, breaks, after work, etc.). Dead time provides good opportunities for instruction at lower cost. To be beneficial, such training experiences should be well prepared, made known to trainees in advance, provided to all students in need and become a regular part of the daily work.
- Provide students with new technical information.
After periods of independent work conducted by the student, it is necessary to engage in follow-up activities that evaluate their performance.

Knowledge of the technological innovations of the trade broadens the trainee’s concept of the job, motivates preparation for new skills and offers a forum for proper use of the new processes.

- Maintain an open attitude toward questions and suggestions. Students have many ideas for improving work conditions, tasks and products. Establish an atmosphere where trainees are empowered, are allowed to improvise, and adapt to the new work environment.

After periods of independent work conducted by the student, it is necessary to engage in follow-up activities that evaluate their performance. Such follow-up activities allow the instructor an opportunity to rectify, provide assistance or validate that a particular task has been done correctly. This insures that incorrect procedures do not become habits.

A Final Word
A contractor can work on a job without knowing all the theory related to the trade. In like manner, an instructor may use good techniques of instruction without knowing the theories of learning in great detail. However, the contractor and instructor will be more effective if they have an understanding of the basic theory related to specific job techniques. With this in mind, instructors should be able to improve the quality of work through trade education in the wall and ceiling industry.

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