



# HOW TO BEGIN AN APPRENTICE PROGRAM

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Dr. Ramsay is also a licensed psychologist and a Diplomate in Industrial and Organizational Psychology from the American Board of Professional Psychology. He is the author of several guides to hiring and management and has more than 30 years of human resources work experience.

When an organization wishes to start a program to provide a route for employees or applicants to receive instruction in maintenance, it often is useful to have a local advisory group of employees and managers to give their advice or assistance. Such a committee might have representation from the maintenance, human resources, and employee representation groups, as well as local training providers.

In a union facility, programs often are called apprenticeships, and in non-represented groups they are called training or learner programs.

## Staffing Plans

One might begin with a review of the organization's business plan, reviewing the staffing plan to determine the trades or crafts that are in greatest demand. When starting from ground zero, it may be best to begin with key jobs or jobs where there is a shortage of qualified persons. One might also consider future attrition due to retirement and/or aging of the skilled workforce.

## Notice of Plan

A description of management's intention should be provided to employees, including hourly and management personnel. Cooperation of union and management is helpful when starting the plan.

## In-House vs. External

One necessary early decision is whether to obtain external assistance or to conduct the program in-house. Sometimes, a combination is best. An in-house program requires staffing as well as physical plant expenditures. Some organizations have cooperated with other local manufacturing or processing facilities for a joint program.

## **Select a Medium to Deliver Instruction**

Local county community colleges often are useful providers of classroom and laboratory instruction. Commercial providers, such as TPC, can offer computerized instruction delivered online. Companies such as GP Strategies Corp. provide courses as well as instructors. Local technical colleges often can provide generic and specific classroom and laboratory training. In-house programs often can use plant machines and equipment for hands-on applications.

It is very tempting to try to do everything in a computerized setting, but usually a combination of classroom, laboratory, and on-the-job instruction is required.

## **Applications**

It always is a good idea to require candidates to fill out an application. A posting of the job vacancy should include information about the training program, as well as a job description including job summary, work to be performed, and consequences of errors. It usually is good practice to have a list of physical activities performed on the job, especially if the job includes working in extreme temperatures, with dirty or greasy materials, or in confined spaces.

Many organizations may require assessment of reading, arithmetic, or aptitude. When the training period is very short, it may be necessary to measure technical job knowledge and skills so the trainees may have a “running start” in the program.

## **Establish Program Length and Content**

Some organizations have been able to reduce an apprentice program from 3 years to 2 years by granting “advanced standing” to persons with a year of training or experience in a military or industrial setting.

## **Periodic Assessment During Training**

Many organizations use online periodic job knowledge tests that show equivalency of 1, 2, or 3 years’ experience. This enables pay-for-knowledge and shortens the time to completion. Another method would be to assess “hands-on” tasks to include, e.g., alignment, hydraulics tasks, pneumatic

tasks, PLC tasks, etc. Those seeking special expertise may use assessments at or above the journey level of performance, through use of a measure of job knowledge with national normative data comparisons.

### **Problem Areas**

Cheating on assessments has progressed with photo capabilities on cellphones, as well as hidden cameras in pens, watches, etc. Proctoring is mandatory or else assessments will be compromised, and replacements are costly.

Failure by an apprentice should require repetition of coursework, and ultimate discharge from the program if failure continues. For the above reasons, grades should be assigned in apprentice classes and tasks.

### **Sources of Assistance**

Unions, as well as state and federal departments of labor and industry, often may provide sources of assistance. One online source is the U.S. Department of Labor O\*NET. There also is the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship. In addition, some veterans' organizations may be helpful, along with local entities such as chambers of commerce and secondary and post-secondary institutions.

### **Meeting the Challenge**

Companies across the country are faced with the task of identifying the most qualified workers to staff their departments. You will be able to find individuals who already have the skills needed to perform the required duties only in the best-case scenarios. Apprenticeship programs can drastically improve your prospects.

Please visit [www.ramsaycorp.com](http://www.ramsaycorp.com) to see how testing can help you start your apprentice program.