

Oversight One Key to Managing
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A frequent cry I hear from employers is that their employees are responsible for the trouble they are in. What trouble you ask? Most any kind of trouble a company can get into, but most typically, lawsuits, and accusations from the Structural Pest Control Board, or County Agricultural Commissioner because of a violation of law. As I hear managers and owners complain about these challenges, the common threads I hear, are "I had no idea," "I have let that employee go," and "There is nothing I can do." In fact the employer should have known, a new employee is likely to create the same problem, and yes indeed there are things they can do to prevent such problems from occurring again. The key is proper oversight of your field employees.

The facts are that indeed many employees do not live up to the standards and training we have given them. All too frequently, however, the employees really have not been properly trained as to the real standards we expect our employees to live up to. Even when we may have initially trained an employee, they need re-training to reinforce the things which can be all too easily forgotten or even purposely ignored.

The first step is to establish in writing the specific expectations you have for employees in each job class. The second step is to develop (or borrow) training, which addresses the specific expectations you have for your employees. Thirdly you must train your employees. Fourth you must verify that the training has been effective. You need to evaluate your employees to determine the effectiveness of your training. Fifthly you need to continue to repeat steps three and four while regularly updating steps one and two.

I would like to focus on the fourth step in this process. As managers it is our job to ensure that our employees are providing the service we have hired them to do in the prescribed manner in which we expect them to do it. It is not enough to train them once and let them go to work on their own. In the next few paragraphs I will discuss a few areas where we can implement some evaluation and oversight of our field employees.

1: Ride-along evaluations. Typically employers will ride along with a new hire shortly after he has been trained to ensure that he has understood the basics. While this is a good idea, this usually falls short in several areas. Most companies will evaluate their employees' performance "seat of the pants." Meaning that there are no formal guidelines as to specific performance expectations, or specific skill sets the employee must demonstrate. Ideally employers should have detailed skill and performance guidelines and

corresponding evaluation check sheets for each of the skill and performance areas. This ensures that each employee is receiving thorough evaluation and training, and documents where each employee's weaknesses and strengths are. The second area where we fail in this area is in follow-up evaluations. We not only need to follow up several times during the first year or two the employee is with us, we also need to follow up with those long term employees. We need to be following up using not only our baseline expectations, but also using the results of prior evaluations to see where the employee has improved, and where they may have fallen behind in our expectations.

2: Covert observation. This is especially apropos as it applies to following safety rules and regulations. I have heard employers say countless times that they can not be at each jobsite to ensure that their employees follow the law and comply with the way they were trained. State and federal OSHA law requires, however, that employers ensure that their employees are in compliance; the fact that you are not on the jobsite is no excuse. I had a supervisor once who was quite adept at following up on his employees in the field. Every few weeks, he would spend a few hours in the field driving a borrowed car (usually a relative's) following his techs around. He quickly discovered who was complying with his training and company guidelines and who was not. Discipline was quick and effective. In my years working for him, I don't know if he covertly observed me or not; he normally only let us know he observed us if he caught us in violation.

3: Following up on the performance in the field. There are many ways of following up on your employee's performance in the field. One low-tech way is sending survey cards to consumers shortly after a service asking for their feedback. This provides a means by which to evaluate your employee's performance, and to head off and address unhappy consumers. Another low-tech way of following up on your employee's performance is to keep close tabs on their paperwork, ensure that the employee's paperwork is neat, and filled out correctly. It is a good idea to randomly (or in many cases not randomly if you have reason to suspect a potential problem) follow up on specific jobsites to evaluate the performance, after the work has been performed. While this is applicable for work performed by licensees of all three branches of structural pest control, it is especially helpful for Branch 3 inspectors. Inspecting a few structures behind your employees helps you to keep tabs on the quality of the work being done. I have heard countless owners and managers tell me horror stories of good inspectors who after many years of good service had a decline in the quality of their inspections. While the reasons can be many - job fatigue, physical or mental health, laziness or other reasons - the challenge is that the owners and managers typically don't become aware of the problem until the inspector has created many problems as a result of a series of bad inspections.

4: Use technology. Fleet safety is one area which is all too often ignored by employers. Not only do we have a duty to screen potential employees to ensure that their driving record reflects the standards we have established, we also have

a duty to continually train our employees and to evaluate their driving behavior over the course of their employment with us. While most companies do this through tracking any changes in their employees' driving record, there are other tools which can give you more immediate feedback as to their driving behavior, and can provide you with better tools for changing their behavior. There are many vendors of driving behavior tracking systems which are available to you. Some use GPS technology, others use onboard computers which track speed, braking and other physical aspects of driving behavior, while others have digital video cameras which activate when there is any severe acceleration, braking or other unsafe behaviors. While each technology has its pros and cons, the key to them is their use by management to evaluate their employee's driving behaviors and to then use these technologies to educate, reward and discipline employees as appropriate to ensure a change in behavior.

Instead of trying to do too many things at once, I encourage you to take on one of these ideas and implement it into your company as you gain greater control and understanding as to how your employees are representing you in the field.