

Hispanic Council Tip Sheet

Breaking Language Barriers and Improving Communication

- Lead by example. Managers who try to learn Spanish and try to communicate with the Hispanic employees in their native language are more likely to have employees interested in trying to learn English.
- When speaking to a non-native English speaking worker, there are several guidelines to follow to ensure that proper communication is made:
 - Organize your thoughts before you begin speaking.
 - Speak slowly and distinctly.
 - Avoid slang and enunciate clearly.
 - Be concrete and ask specifically for what you want..
 - Style of speaking also helps. Keep the tone of your voice calm and respectful.
- Using visual aids such as pictures, charts and diagrams are good ways to communicate ideas or thoughts as well as writing down instructions or key ideas.
- Having a bilingual employee who can act as a translator can be helpful but be careful of liability issues when that person is asked to perform beyond their duties. Also, recognize that things can get lost in translation and what the translator relays to the worker and what the worker comprehends may not be the same.
- **Communicards** are pocket-guides and card sets that use illustrated drawings for English and Spanish speakers to communicate on the job site. www.thecommunicard.com.

Management

- Provide training and workplace communication in Spanish.
 - Handbooks and policies should be provided in Spanish so employees fully understand what is expected of them.
 - Take efforts to explain concepts that are culturally new.
- Foreign employees are often confused about US policies, such as health insurance and benefits. So taking the time to explain these policies will give the worker a better understanding of his options.
- Assure them that they will not be punished for requesting clarification. Afraid of damaging their pride and of being criticized, they often will not speak up if they do not understand something which can result in a job-related injury.
- Not only is it important to explain what and how things are done, but also training needs to explain why things are done. When employees understand why certain parts of a procedure are important, they are much more likely to learn the procedure correctly and develop good habits when performing it.
- Provide wallet size information cards with contact information such as who an employee should contact regarding payroll questions or safety questions.

Understanding the Hispanic Culture

- Getting to know your employees on a personal level will help communication as well as improve job performance. Finding out his/her country of origin is showing interest in him/her as person, not just as an employee.

- Be aware of how you form your crews. Regionalism is a strong component of the Hispanic culture and if certain people are mixed in one crew, tension possibly fights can occur. Remind your crew that we all share the same goal, to get the job done together.
- As in most cultures, respect the tradition that family comes first. Family is of primary importance in the Hispanic culture.
- To build better relationships with your employees, take the time to ask questions about their families, maybe ask them to share pictures.
- Interacting with your employees is the only way to understand their culture. A good way to get to know them is to have lunch maybe one day a week in the company's lunch room or get pizza, etc. for the crew in the work field.
- Encourage picnics or staff events to show appreciation is a great way to get to know your employees.
- Holding events such as raffling off tickets to the DC United or awarding an employee for a job well done can boost morale.

5 Critical Training Needs for Hispanic Employees

- **Safety Training**
 - Most Latin-American countries do not have organizations such as OSHA to enforce jobsite safety, so it is not uncommon that they are not used to wearing hardhats, steel-toed boots, or even safety glasses.
 - Take a few minutes to review the safety procedures and have an experienced worker do a demonstration. Express how critical it is that everyone follow these safety procedures.
 - A great way to provide safety information is to include a "safety stuffer" along with their paychecks.
- **Life-Skills Training**
 - Hispanic culture differs from American culture in many ways so to understand the differences will enable you to understand your employees better.
- **Leadership Training**
 - Provide learned solid communication, organizational and management skills.
 - Providing leadership training for Hispanic employees will give them more confidence as well as opportunities to move up in their company.
- **English Training**
 - Managers/Supervisors who hire non-English speaking employees should be responsible for providing English training to those employees.
 - As well as encouraging non-English speaking employees to learn the language, it is also important and helpful to learn their language as well.
- **Job Skills**
 - Due to the lack of educational opportunities in other countries, many Hispanic employees have a lower level of formal education, including reading and writing skills. In this case, training needs to be done by demonstration. Visual aids, videos, and actual hands-on training are effective tools.
 - Most accidents happen within one to two weeks of a new employee's time with a company so it is imperative that they receive the proper training before assigning them to the actual job site.

