



TRAINING IS THE KEY TO UNLOCKING THE CERTIFICATION DOOR

An Employer's Guide to the Selection and Implementation of a Training Program

Ask a realtor for the three most important factors in making a sale, and the response you're likely to hear is "location, location, and location." The same could be equally said of the importance of training in predicting success on the CCO certification examinations.

While other factors, such as experience, clearly have their place in defining an operator's proficiency, reports from employers, test site coordinators, and training professionals around the country indicate that the candidate who goes into the testing room with the benefit of structured, professional training has a much greater chance of success than his untrained counterpart.

But how, as an employer, do you provide that training? The National Commission for the Certification of Crane Operators (NCCCO) does not offer training since that could compromise its objective measurement of a candidate's knowledge and skills. Nor is NCCCO in a position to approve or endorse any training firm or program. That would require a review procedure outside NCCCO's mandate. Nevertheless, recognizing the critical role that training plays in certification's role of elevating operator proficiency, NCCCO works with many firms and individuals that have endorsed the CCO certification program and who are actively training operators in preparation for their CCO certification examinations.

An excellent place to get started in the training process is the CCO Candidate Handbook. Although, for obvious reasons, NCCCO does not reveal actual test questions, no one need be in any doubt about the content of the examinations. All the "knowledge areas" identified by subject matter experts and validated through operator surveys as being critical to safe crane operations (i.e., the minimum a crane operator needs to know in order to safely operate a crane) are specified there, along with a list of reference materials. These publications, including the required reading of OSHA and ASME standards, are used to develop test questions, and together provide an excellent body of study material.

Selecting Training

With a curriculum and reference sources in hand, how do you then go about identifying a source of training? Among the first questions you'll want to ask is: Do I have the resources to develop and teach an in-house program, or would I be better off hiring a professional trainer? Apprenticeship programs, or training courses provided through Operating Engineers' locals, can also prove to be an excellent source of quality training.

The commitment necessary to develop an in-house crane operator training program can be formidable; it takes time, funding and expertise. Once established, however, an in-house program allows scheduling of employees for training to be done entirely at your convenience. Using some of the crane-specific textbooks and audio-visual materials that are now available can accelerate the process. Some training firms also offer "train - the- trainer" courses that include tutoring in teaching techniques, as well as materials that may be used as the basis of your in-house program.

Hiring a professional training firm may prove to be an easier solution, but scheduling can be more problematic. Also, bringing future new-hires up to speed will require you either send them to school or wait until it becomes cost -effective to bring a trainer back in. However, this approach does mean you will be able to conduct "refresher" training of other employees at the same time.

If you opt to outsource training, how do you select a training firm? NCCCO recommends employers start by selecting several of those companies that actively provide preparation for the CCO exam, and request confirmation that they cover all the knowledge areas on the test. Then, just as with any other service, request references that you can call to verify the quality of training provided.

Don't be shy either of asking questions such as: How many of your instructors have taken the CCO exam(s)? How many CCO examination preparatory courses have you held? What is your success rate to date? Also, be sure to have your reference source identify the instructor(s) by name; a good program can fall apart in the hands of an ineffective trainer.

Cramming vs. Planning

Whether your instructor is in-house or brought in from outside, one of the first things he (or she) is going to have to decide is: How much training, and when? For economic as well as scheduling reasons there's going to be a temptation to try to cram in as much material in as short a time as possible. That may not always be the best decision for the candidate, nor the best investment of your training dollars.

Some employers have learned the hard way that only by carefully establishing the proficiency level of their operators prior to training (otherwise known as a "training needs analysis"), do they really know how much instruction may be necessary. As an example, before you can expect an operator to accurately read and interpret a load chart, he clearly needs to be able to read. Make no assumptions! Illiteracy and learning difficulties are more commonplace than you might expect.

A simple pre-training test, perhaps comprised of some of the "sample questions" available from the NCCCO website (not actual test questions but of a type and style similar to those found on the exams), can provide useful insight into an operator's basic linguistic and comprehension skills as well as his knowledge about crane operations. If remedial "basic skills" instruction in the "three Rs" is required, then clearly the best time to do this is before valuable training dollars have been spent on trying to teach crane skills.

Load Charts, Load Charts, Load Charts

Employers and operators often ask: What areas do candidates fail on the most? To use our realtor's analogy again, there are three: load charts, load charts and load charts. Knowledgeable crane experts all agree: there is no more abused, misunderstood or just plain ignored aspect of crane operations than the crane's load chart, a fact NCCCO can confirm based on its experience of administering more than 100,000 tests. And yet, without a thorough understanding of a crane's load chart, an operator cannot have an accurate picture of either its capabilities or its limitations.

In any case, the ASME B30.5 mobile crane standard requires operators to "demonstrate their ability to read, write, comprehend, and exhibit arithmetic skills and load/capacity chart usage, in the language of the crane manufacturer's operation and maintenance materials." Foolhardy indeed is the operator who ignores the rating chart in today's high-tech, versatile machines--equally so, the candidate wishing to become a "CCO-certified operator."

Pre-training tests can also be useful in achieving employee "buy-in" and overcoming any negative attitudes. Operators who express doubts about their need for training usually either genuinely believe they "know it all" or fear failing the exam and the consequences this may have on their future employability. Pre-tests allow an operator to discover for himself the limitations of his knowledge, to gain respect for the training process, and to realize the personal benefit that his or her full participation can bring. After all, what better way to give crane operators the recognition and respect befitting a skilled occupation than through professional certification?

Pre-tests can also help to build confidence while at the same time defusing the anxiety of examinations that most employees harbor from their school days; reports from several test site coordinators and instructors point to the benefit of having students overcome this fear by repeated test-taking during training. This is a strategy that also allows the effectiveness of the program to be monitored and the training focus to be adjusted as necessary. Becoming completely familiar with the details of test-day procedures (registration, rules, seating arrangements, etc.) can also help to calm nerves.

The Scheduling Dilemma

Incorporating training into existing work schedules with the minimum of disruption can be a challenge. Some employers find that, short of shutting their company down for a week or more, their work schedules simply rule out putting all of their operators through crane school at one time. Others, with access to more flexible programs, have been able to organize after-hours or weekend sessions of an hour or two a couple of times a week over a couple of months.

Not only does this have the least impact on work schedules, but it provides for a more measured approach to training. Operators can take the information they acquired one day and put it straight to work at the job site the next. Experts agree: there's simply no better method of reinforcing learning than putting new found knowledge into practice. Moreover, slower learners can use the periods between training sessions to work on their particular areas of weakness.

The Bottom Line

The decision on whether or not to train your employees is one that OSHA, industry standards and just plain good sense have already made for you as an employer. How to provide that training, however, requires a careful evaluation of your company's resources, and a thorough review of the options available, along with recognition of some of the "human factors" and logistical issues that training brings. It is not a process you should rush; the safety of your employees and those they work with, not to mention the general public, will likely depend on the decisions you make on their behalf.

BEFORE YOU SETTLE ON A TRAINING VENDOR . . .

Be sure you have answers to the following questions:

- Where and when are these classes held? Do I come to your site, or you to mine?
- How many hours does the training last? What's the cost?
- How many of your instructors have passed the CCO written examinations? In what specialties?
- What is your average class pass rate?
- Are you also able to offer the CCO Practical Exam?
- Do you have CCO-Accredited Practical Examiners on staff?
- Are you able to put together a complete training and CCO certification "package" (i.e. training, and written and practical exams)?

See elsewhere on the NCCCO web site for additional information and a list of training firms that will provide training in preparation for the CCO examinations.

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