

A Safety Manager's Guide to **EDUCATION**



Table of Contents:

1. [Ergonomics Training: Two Critically Important Elements of Success](#)
2. [A Safety Manager's Guide to Ergonomics Training](#)
3. [Ergonomics Training and Education for Maximum Human Performance](#)
4. [The 5-Step Checklist Human Performance and Ergonomics Training Checklist](#)

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Ergonomics Training – Two Critically Important Elements of Success

A business process is only as effective as the people behind it.

This fact is especially prevalent with your ergonomics improvement process. The purpose of your process is to identify and remove ergonomic risk factors by making practical and cost-effective workplace improvements.



The benefits of successful execution of your ergonomics process are many; reduced injuries and associated costs, productivity improvements and better product quality, to name just a few.

While ergonomics isn't rocket science, the most successful companies have a well-trained and well-equipped workforce to support the process. Ergonomics training ensures your workforce is empowered to accomplish the roles and responsibilities you've strategically laid out for them. In fact, the best ergonomics training will give your people the tools and know-how to *thrive* in their role.

That's where we're headed. But first, let's take a step back and think about the big picture.

Keep the Big Picture in Mind

There are two “big picture” things to keep in mind before we get to specific ergonomics training tactics.

1. Keep in mind who is responsible for ergonomics and workplace improvements.

The word [ergonomics](#) comes from the Greek word “ergon” which means work and “nomos” which means laws. It’s essentially the science of work. Good ergonomic design removes incompatibilities between the work and the worker and creates the optimal work environment. This allows you to efficiently create the best product possible.

Who do you think should be responsible for creating the best product (or delivering the best service) possible?

If you’re thinking that should be everyone’s job, you’re right. Everyone at your company is responsible for the ergonomics process, and everyone needs the knowledge and tools to successfully execute their role in the process and meet their responsibilities. This goes for the CEO and leadership team all the way to the real workplace experts, the employees on the shop floor.

Ergonomics training should be approached from this high-level perspective and given adequate time, attention and resources. Without these things, you won’t get the results you’re looking for and you’ll be missing out on a huge opportunity.

2. Keep in mind your overall strategy and set yourself up for success.

Ergonomics training should be implemented strategically, keeping in mind your overall health and safety goals. What you are ultimately hoping to accomplish is

improved human performance for your company, and in order for that to happen, you must include the human being during the training process.

Ergonomics training should not only include the science of ergonomics and workplace improvements, but it also needs to include training on proper work practices and how workers can keep their bodies fit for the work they have chosen to do.

In other words, your company is responsible for providing a good “fit” between the work and the worker through ergonomics. The worker is responsible for using good work practices and staying fit so they can do their job. Health, safety, productivity and quality all depend upon this partnership between the company and the worker.

The best training ensures everyone understands their role in the partnership, takes responsibility for it and becomes excellent at it. That is where excellence in ergonomics is born.

Conclusion

Ergonomics training is a vital piece of the workplace ergonomics puzzle. A well-trained and well-equipped workforce makes all the difference.

Maximum human performance is achieved at the intersection of good workplace design and a healthy, fit workforce. If that sounds unattainable (or too expensive), think again. The opportunities to enhance human performance are abundant, and the vast majority of these opportunities have both practical and cost-effective solutions.

Recognizing the many opportunities at your facility and implementing the right solutions begins with the right training.

A Safety Manager's Guide to Ergonomics Training

Here is a quick quiz for safety, HR, plant managers and anyone else responsible for protecting and promoting the health of workers:

- Is your workforce trained and equipped well enough to make consistent improvements to your workplace?
- Do you have an ergonomics improvement process that is improving productivity and product quality while at the same time reducing injury risk and preventing costly MSDs? Can you prove it through careful evaluation?
- Are your employees engaged and fully committed to health and safety? Do they believe management cares about them enough to make improvements to their workstation and promote their health and well-being?
- Is health and safety a core value at your company? (Not just on your company website, bulletin board or newsletter, but for real.) Is human performance driving business results for your company?



No matter how well (or poorly) you did on the quiz, training and educating your workforce will make your human performance and ergonomics process better. Well-trained and well-equipped people supporting your process is what makes it go, and strong systems combined with strong people will go a long way.

Remember to keep these two “big picture” ideas in mind:

1. Understand that everyone at your company is responsible for workplace improvements and this translates to making the best product (or delivering the best service) possible.
2. Ergonomics shouldn't be operating in a silo. It should be integrated into an overall human performance strategy that includes improved health, fitness and wellness of employees as well as making sure they are using proper work practices.

With those two ideas firmly kept in mind, let's get started with ergonomics training objectives and best practices.

Ergonomics Training Objectives

The purpose of these training objectives are to provide your people with the knowledge and tools to successfully accomplish their designated roles and responsibilities for the process.

(We've written about these roles / responsibilities before. For a quick reminder or to catch up, read [A Guide to MSD Prevention Roles and Responsibilities](#).)

Following are learning objectives for specific roles in the process.

Everyone. Everyone at your company should understand the benefits of this process and the overall value and importance it provides your company. Everyone should also have an understanding of basic principles of prevention and the core components of the prevention process.

Leadership Team. The primary objective with leadership is to gain their ongoing support of this process. They should be educated on the goals of the process and how those goals will be met and evaluated. They should also have a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities for the entire process.

Engineers and Facility Staff. Engineers should learn the skills required for them to identify and remove ergonomic risk factors. This should include training on ergonomic evaluation tools and good ergonomic design principles.

Safety / Ergonomics Team. The ergonomics team should be well educated on the ergonomics improvement process. Training should include how to identify high risk job demands and implement practical and cost-effective solutions using a team approach. Training should also emphasize evaluating workplace improvements for effectiveness and utilizing a continuous improvement approach.

Supervisors. Supervisors should be trained on encouraging early reporting of fatigue and discomfort and should be capable of demonstrating and teaching proper work practices.

Employees. Employees should be aware of risk factors (at work and at home) that put them at greater risk for developing an MSD. They should have training on proper work practices, and how they can report workstation improvement ideas through the proper channels. They should be highly encouraged to report the earliest signs of fatigue and discomfort to their supervisor or injury prevention specialist so a proactive effort can be made to reverse the problem and prevent the injury.

Ergonomics Training Best Practices

Practice what you preach. When you walk into the room, your past actions are walking in with you. It is vitally important that you live out every day what you are about to teach in the classroom. Credibility is huge – don't take this lightly.

Don't put them to sleep. Let's face it; ergonomics training isn't as exciting as the latest Jason Bourne action movie. But just because it isn't all that exciting doesn't mean you can't approach it with a positive and enthusiastic attitude. You set the

tone for the training session, so make sure you're the most enthusiastic person in the room even if the audience doesn't respond the way you had hoped.

Be hands on. Classroom training is important, but practical application of learning material is where knowledge is ingrained into the brain and real progress is made. Follow up formal classroom training sessions with one-on-one time out on the shop floor or office workstation.

Don't stop educating. The statistics on memory retention are disappointing for trainers. Sadly, much of what you teach will be forgotten. For this reason, it is important that training doesn't stop once you leave the classroom doors. Ongoing classroom sessions (as well as the hands-on application training described above) will allow the training content and core learning objectives to sink in over time.

Integrate training and education every day. Take advantage of every opportunity to educate and train your workforce. If every meeting begins with a safety talk, take two to three minutes to reinforce the core learning objectives of MSD prevention training. If you have injury prevention and wellness handouts, post them in high traffic areas. If you have a newsletter, tell a success story of how an injury was prevented or how an employee has changed their life for the better by becoming healthy and fit. When your people come to work, they shouldn't be there for long without a reminder of their training.

Get better. An employee survey is a great way to get feedback on your training sessions so you can continuously improve your training. Strive to improve your training content and delivery.

Conclusion

Establish core learning objectives for each role in the process and utilize training best practices to build a well-trained and well-equipped workforce to manage your human performance and ergonomics process.

Ergonomics Training and Education for Maximum Human Performance

What are you *really* trying to accomplish with your ergonomics process?

There are many possible answers to this question. Here are a few of them:

- Reducing exposure to ergonomic risk factors
- Preventing musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs)
- Reducing worker's compensation costs
- Improving productivity
- Improving product quality
- Increasing employee engagement
- Protecting and promoting the health of your workforce



All of these answers make logical sense. It is likely that the goals you've set out for your ergonomics process include one or more of them.

These are not wrong answers, but I would like to assert that a more productive and comprehensive way of approaching this process is to set a goal of *maximizing human performance*.

Maximum human performance is achieved at the intersection of good workplace design and a healthy, fit and engaged workforce.

An ergonomically efficient workstation with an unhealthy and unmotivated worker using poor work practices is not your goal. A healthy, motivated worker that is

forced to work outside her body's capabilities and limitations is not your goal. Your goal has to be a well-designed and efficient workstation within the capabilities and limitations of a healthy, fit and engaged worker.

By achieving maximum human performance, you will also be achieving all of the goals stated above. The right training will help you get there.

So far in this ebook on Human Performance and Ergonomics Training, we've covered the high-level elements needed for success and the learning objectives and best practices of training.

This section will focus on the types of training content needed to achieve an effective workplace improvement process and a healthy, fit and engaged workforce.

Education and Training Content

I hope I've been able to convince that your goal should be maximum human performance.

Earlier I said that, "Maximum human performance is achieved at the intersection of good workplace design and a healthy, fit and engaged workforce."

So what we need is ...

1. a process to improve workplace design (the ergonomics improvement process) and
2. a healthy, fit and engaged workforce

Your education and training content should reflect these two fundamental needs of a process to improve human performance.

You will need ergonomics training content for an effective ergonomics improvement process and you will need MSD prevention and wellness training

content for a healthy, fit and engaged workforce. Following is a list of training content ideas to get you started on the right track.

Ergonomics Training Content

Ergonomics training should equip your workforce to effectively execute the ergonomics improvement process.

Training content should include:

1. How to develop a prioritized list of jobs for evaluation.
2. How to conduct an objective ergonomic analysis.
3. How to develop an ergonomic opportunity list.
4. How to use ergonomic design guidelines to determine the best solution with a team approach.
5. How to obtain final approval and implement the right ergonomic improvement.
6. How to evaluate the ergonomic improvement for effectiveness.

Keep in mind the roles and responsibilities of each training group (leadership, engineers, ergonomics team members, employees, supervisors, etc.) and tailor the content specifically for that group. The content needs to enable each group to meet their roles and responsibilities for the process.

Further reading:

- [Workplace Ergonomics 101](#)
- [A Guide to MSD Prevention Roles and Responsibilities](#)
- [How to Build an Ergonomics Team that Gets Results](#)

MSD Prevention and Wellness Content

A healthy, fit and engaged workforce will not happen overnight, but it is possible. No, not all of your industrial athletes will have the physical performance of an Olympic Athlete. What you are striving to accomplish is an improvement over their current performance. You're trying to reduce their individual risk factors for developing an MSD and other chronic health conditions.

Training content should include:

- Benefits of the ergonomics and MSD prevention process
- Basic MSD prevention principles
- The core elements of the prevention process
- MSD prevention roles and responsibilities
- How to identify and report early signs (fatigue and discomfort) of MSDs
- How to report workstation improvement ideas
- How to use the injury prevention tools available to them
- How to use proper work techniques
- How to create and maintain a personal wellness plan
- How to eat properly and keep their body fit for work
- How to get enough rest and fully recover

Further reading:

- [Why Ergonomics and Wellness Are a Powerful Match](#)
- [Five Reasons Why an Athletic Trainer Deserves a Sport on Your OHS Team](#)

Conclusion

To achieve maximum human performance at your facility, you will need an effective ergonomics improvement process *and* a strategy to improve employee health, fitness and engagement.

Your training content should include reflect these goals.

Need more?

The goal of this ebook is to point you in the right direction and help you focus your human performance and ergonomics training efforts in the right direction.

While we hope this information is useful, we realize many of you might have more specific and immediate training needs. Putting together the training content described above takes years and strategically delivering it in a way that aligns with the rest of your ergonomics and human performance efforts is even more difficult and time-consuming.

The good news is that we've been there (for over 20 years) and we've already done all the heavy lifting for you. [Get in touch with us](#) today to learn how an experienced partner would benefit your situation.

[Contact us.](#)

The 5-Step Checklist for Human Performance and Ergonomics Training

By now, you're probably aware of the benefits of well-trained and well-equipped people to support your ergonomics improvement process.

You know that maximum human performance is achieved at the intersection of good workplace design and a healthy, fit and engaged workforce.

You know that the positive impact a successful ergonomics process has on production, quality, safety and human performance can be a competitive advantage for your business.

Ergonomics training doesn't have to be as complicated as rocket science or brain surgery, but it can be a little tricky to get all the right pieces in place to achieve sustainable results.

So today, we're offering a 5-step checklist to get you started on the right foundation. This checklist can serve as a good review of our ergonomics training and education series.

Check these items off your list, and - based on our experience over the last two decades - you'll have the right framework to create a successful ergonomics training and education process.



Step 1 – Involve Everyone in the Education and Training Process

By removing incompatibilities between the work and the worker, good ergonomic design allows you to create the highest quality product in the most efficient way possible. Because *everyone* at your company plays a role in creating the best product (or delivering the best service) possible, *everyone* should be involved in the ergonomics improvement process.

Each person must have clearly defined roles and responsibilities in the process, and ergonomics training and education should equip each person to meet their roles and responsibilities.

Step 2 – Keep Your Overall Health & Safety Goals in Mind

Ultimately, the goal for your OHS process is to achieve maximum human performance. This is achieved at the intersection of good workplace design and a healthy, fit and engaged workforce.

Because of this, your education and training process should not only include the science of ergonomics and workplace improvements, but it also needs to include training on proper work practices and how workers can keep their bodies fit for the work they have chosen to do.

Step 3 – Align Training Content With Roles & Responsibilities

Your training content should be tailored to each group and aligned with their roles and responsibilities. The purpose of training is to create a well-equipped workforce to support your ergonomics and human performance process. Make sure your training content makes sense for your target audience and empowers them to accomplish their responsibilities. Otherwise, you run the risk of frustrating your people and losing support for the process.

(For more, read [A Guide to MSD Prevention Roles and Responsibilities](#).)

Step 4 – Use Education & Training Best Practices

Use training best practices to get the most out of your ergonomics and human performance training efforts. Here are a few best practices to start with:

- Practice what you preach.
- Create engaging content that doesn't put your audience to sleep.
- Be hands-on and create learning opportunities outside the classroom.
- View ergonomics training as an ongoing process that doesn't end at the end of a training session.
- Integrate education and training into the everyday schedule by taking every opportunity to include your message on ergonomics and human performance.

Step 5 – Continuously Improve Your Ergonomics Training Process

As with any other business process, you should always be striving to improve your human performance and ergonomics training process. Work to improve both your training content and delivery. Employee surveys are a great way to determine how your training sessions are going. Use them to generate feedback and improvement ideas.

Conclusion

Just like building the foundation of a sturdy house, accomplish each item on this checklist and you'll have something solid that will serve you for years to come.

Are you ready to take your OHS process to the next level?

Take advantage of over two decades of experience and request a free consultation today.

Request a Free Consultation

Interested in more?

Contact Mark Middlesworth, Ergonomics Plus founder and president, to discover how your company can benefit from a comprehensive ergonomics and MSD prevention process.

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