

Module 10: New Employee Training and Professionalism



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Welcome to the Iowa Certified Nursery Professional Training program Module 10: New Employee Training and Professionalism.

Module Objectives

1. Identify what makes a “good” horticulture industry employee.
2. Discuss how to interact positively with the customer.
3. Discuss how to determine a customer’s needs.
4. Describe the characteristics of an appropriate relationship between you and your employer and fellow employees.

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After completing this module you will be able to:

1. Identify what makes a “good” horticulture industry employee.
2. Discuss how to interact positively with the customer.
3. Discuss how to determine a customer’s needs.
4. Describe the characteristics of an appropriate relationship between you and your employer and fellow employees.

Your First Week on the Job

- Paperwork
 - Payroll forms, tax forms, liability waivers, etc.
- Uniforms or attire requirements
- Tour of the employee facilities and the sales area
 - Break rooms, bathrooms for employee and customers, nursery areas, workshops, etc.



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When you begin your first day on the job, you may have paperwork for payroll, or insurance forms to fill out if you haven't done so already. This paperwork is important because it makes sure you get paid and that the company is following legal procedures in hiring you.

You may also be issued a uniform or told exactly what to wear while at work. Remember this; it is important. You may tour the garden center, nursery area, crew areas, design center or other parts of the company. This tour should include employee break rooms, bathrooms for both employees and for the customers. This is a good time to pay attention and learn where things are so when a customer asks for something in particular you will be able to help them find it.

Your First Week on the Job

- Questions you might have:
 - How to run the cash register
 - Where merchandise is located
- When in doubt ASK!



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It is common for new employees to feel uncomfortable with the location of merchandise, or how to properly handle a customer request. Your employer knows that you don't know where everything is or how to do everything the way they want you to. When you are faced with a situation where you are unsure of what the proper procedure is, ask.

Many employers will have a training program for their new employees so they can "learn the ropes." For garden center, retail and nursery employees this training may include how to run the register, how to check on a customer's order, where to find particular plants or other materials, how to place an order. Training may also include simple things like how to transfer a phone call to a different department, how to print a receipt, how to page another employee. During these training sessions ask questions when you don't understand. Training days can sometimes be overwhelming, don't be afraid to ask to be shown something again or to have your supervisor watch you do something and make sure you are doing it correctly.

Don't hesitate to ask for help from your supervisor or more experienced employees when a customer asks a question to which you do not know the answer. Customers will understand that you are new and might not know all the answers; they will be appreciative if you can help them find the answer and you can learn something new too.

“Good” Employee Behavior

- Reflects on you *and* your employer
 - When you are with a customer
 - When you are NOT with a customer



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Your behavior while on the job reflects not only on you and your work, but also on your employer. Be aware of what you are doing or not doing when you are working. When you are with a customer, your behavior should be professional, attentive, helpful, and positive. But your behavior when you are not with a customer speaks just as loudly as when you are with a customer. If you are not helping a customer, you should be doing something else; watering plants, stocking the shelves, sweeping the floor. There is always something to do. If you find yourself out of work, ask for more. If a customer walks in, needing help and you and your co-workers are watching TV and ignoring them, that customer may not return. If you work on an installation crew, don't sit down and start eating your lunch on the client's deck furniture.

“Good” Employee Appearance

- Your personal appearance reflects on you *and* the company
- Wear clean clothes without holes or stains
 - Keep your uniform clean
- Showered and groomed
- Have good posture, confidence



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Unfortunately, an employee's personal appearance can create an impression on the customer about the company. This is the reason that companies issue uniforms to their employees. Uniforms create a single look that distinguishes employees from customers. Keep your uniform and other work clothes clean and in good condition. Holes in the knees are not appropriate; stains are not good either. Wear your clothing properly; if your pants slide down, wear a belt.

“Good” Employee Attitude

- Positive attitude will take you miles
 - With customers, with fellow employees, with employers
- Be motivated, energetic, productive
- Get along with people
 - Service jobs require interacting with people



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Having a positive attitude towards life in general and towards your job can take you a long way. Being positive and happy for a majority of the time can make getting along with others easier. Customers, fellow employees, and employers will notice your positive attitude. Workers with positive attitudes tend to be more motivated, more energetic and more productive. Your employer will notice and you will be rewarded for your increased effort. Service jobs, like working in a nursery or on an installation crew, or as a landscape designer, all require working directly with people. A positive attitude makes working with those people easier, and you will be more helpful and productive.

Warning

- Green industry is not about the plants; it's about the people
- You are an “expert”
- Your knowledge gives you power



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Most jobs in the green industry are service or retail based. Service jobs include landscape design and installation, and many aspects of retail garden centers. Retail garden centers and nurseries sell plants, hardscape materials (rocks, pavers, etc.). Many retail centers also act as an answer service. People who have reasonable experience with gardening and those that have little experience find they can get pretty good advice from the staff at their local garden center. This gives you a position of power and knowledge: **DO NOT ABUSE IT!**

Private homeowners are more likely to try many small, less effective remedies for a problem before taking any drastic steps. Your knowledge about what might work and what won't work can help save that customer money, but it is going to be a harder sell. People will spend or not spend money based on the advice you give, balance your need to make a sale with the well being of the plant in question.

Customer Interaction

- Face to face
 - Greet and approach the customer
 - “Hello, is there something I can help you find?”
 - Help if they need/want it
- Always listen and respond
- Develop a rapport



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When interacting with the customer, there are some basic courtesies that you should practice. Greet all the customers if possible. Simply say “hello”, or “hi, can I help you find something?” If the customer says “No, I am just looking” allow them to wander around and look; maybe you could point them in the direction of some popular plants or those that you like. If they are looking for some help, listen to the customer’s request or question. Maybe their request is really simple, where a particular plant is located.

If their request is not as simple, then switch into detective mode. Through all this, be sure you are listening to what they have to say, this will help you better serve the customer and they will look highly upon you personally and the company. It can be helpful when listening to repeat back to the speaker what you have heard. This can help avoid miscommunications and confusion, especially if it noisy.

Detective Mode

- Determining a customer's needs can be tricky
- Ask questions about the situation/site
 - Sun exposure, wind, water, soil type, other plants, etc.
- Ask questions about their preferences
 - Evergreen or deciduous, flowering, flower color, size, shape, price



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Try to gather as much information as you can about the situation, without being annoying. For example, a customer has asked you what plant they should put in this particular spot in their backyard. You need to know some basic information about that site before you can make a recommendation. Ask questions about the amount of sunlight, the wind, the type of soil, etc. Also ask questions about they like in a plant; do they like evergreens, or flowering plants, what color flowers, trimmed, shaped plants or more irregular shapes? Asking for pictures of the site in question may also help you understand better.

Some customers are going to be easier to help than others. If you find you are not able to come up with a plant to fit their needs, try asking a fellow employee if they might have a different opinion. Selecting the proper plant for a client might be limited by the number of plants you personally know, so enlisting the help of others will help the customer and you learn about a new plant.

Customer Interaction

- Via phone
 - Ask if there is a standard manner to answer the phone
 - Greet the customer in a friendly manner
 - Give them your name so they can call you specifically in the future



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When interacting with a customer over the phone most of the same principles apply as when interacting face to face. Greet the customer in a friendly, professional manner. If you work with a customer for an extended period of time, give them your name so they can talk to you specifically if they have problems or more questions. This is helpful for the customer and for the company because you have already invested the time to learn the history of the project and have developed a rapport with that particular customer.

Customer Interaction

- Difficult customers
 - Maintain your cool, stay friendly
 - Don't make it worse by getting angry too
 - When the situation is beyond your control, seek assistance from a supervisor



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You are likely to run into somebody who you can't please. In those situations, avoid escalating the situation. Maintain your friendly, helpful attitude even if you are really irritated. If the customer becomes belligerent and forceful, do not be afraid to refer them to your supervisor. Supervisors have special training to deal with angry customers. Also supervisors are better positioned to reduce the price of a job, or offer a special deal to fix the problem.

Work-Place Relationships

- Know the people you are working for
 - Supervisor, manager, owner
- Follow the company mission or vision
- Work in a manner to better the company
 - This behavior will be noticed and rewarded



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As an employee, it is your responsibility to get to know those people you work with and for. Develop a positive, helpful relationship your supervisor or manager and the owner of the company. Learn the company mission or vision. Understanding what the owner values and what the company's mission is can help you tailor your work to better the company. You can help your employer improve the business and increase profits in several ways:

1. Put in an honest day's work for a day's pay
2. Complete your work in a reasonable time frame and to the best of your ability
3. Improve your job performance
4. Develop positive relationships with fellow employees
5. Suggests ways to improve the business

Work-Place Relationships

- Employee-to-employee relationships
 - Be considerate towards others
 - Do not impose on others; being late to work, abusing sick leave or breaks
 - Cooperate with others
 - Team work



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Employee-to-employee relationships are critical to the success of the business. Working well with your fellow employees will allow the owner and supervisors to concentrate on more important things, instead of settling differences between employees. Treat other employees that way you want to be treated. Being late to work and abusing sick leave or lunch breaks will create animosity between employees making it difficult to work together efficiently. Cooperation is key. A sales team or installation crew must work well together for the company to make a profit. Cooperation between the retail sales team and the installation crews is critical too. In a design-build firm with a retail center or nursery interdepartmental cooperation is key to completing any design job.

That concludes this module.

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That concludes this module.