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Hands-On Technical Workshops

by Ron Beaufort

The Big Differences In How We Teach

This page is intended to give you enough information to make the best possible investment in PLC training. We've made several point-by-point comparisons to show just some of the differences between "how we teach" and "how they teach" based mainly on what we've heard from our customers. Take a look at what we offer - and then check out our competition. After you've made your own comparison, we hope that you'll give us an opportunity to prove that our training is better than anything else available. Then after you've tried us, decide for yourself whether or not you're satisfied. If you're not, we'll give you your money back. Period.

Our method uses realistic projects followed by short, active discussions

We've developed our unique Problem/Solution teaching method over many years of successfully providing training to plant maintenance technicians. Basically we skip the lecture and assign a realistic project instead. As each student works individually toward a solution, the instructor provides just enough "over the shoulder" coaching to keep the student on track. At the end of each assignment, the instructor leads all of the students through a group discussion of the material that has just been covered. The keystone of the Problem/Solution method's success is that our students are invariably maintenance technicians who fully enjoy this completely hands-on approach to learning. There are no scheduled breaks other than for lunch - and the students prefer it that way. This is definitely not your run-of-the-mill training.

Our "Problem/Solution" training method keeps all of our students continuously and actively involved in the learning process.

Most competitors use lengthy lectures followed by short labs

In the traditional Lecture/Lab approach used by most of our competitors, the instructor first gives a lengthy lecture which is then followed by a short lab session. In theory the lab exercise is supposed to reinforce the material which was just introduced during the lecture. In practice it usually turns out that the students quickly become bored during the first few minutes of the lecture and then practically "coast" through the rest of it. Consequently the instructor is then forced to simply guide the students step by step through their lab exercises. The major shortcoming of the Lecture/Lab method is the inactivity of the students during the lecture sessions. This adds up to a lot of wasted classroom time. No matter how dedicated the instructor, and no matter how motivated the students, it invariably proves impossible to master the material presented during hour upon hour of lectures - especially in a course which lasts several days in a row.

The "Problem/Solution" training method concentrates on the hands-on training that maintenance technicians prefer. We won't waste your time on lengthy lectures.

We can accommodate students at different levels in the same class

It is a simple truth that all students are not created equal. Classes are invariably made up of individuals who have different backgrounds, experiences, and natural aptitudes. Our new Problem/Solution method capitalizes on these differences and uses them as educational tools. While the students are independently working through their assigned tasks, the instructor continuously monitors the progress of each student on an individual basis. This allows the instructor to pinpoint the areas in which extra coaching is needed. Any students who are able to proceed with little or no extra help may be assigned additional tasks to keep them constantly challenged and involved. This approach not only allows the instructor to focus on the unique needs of each student but it also increases both the scope and the depth of the material which can be covered. The instructor constantly insures that each student recognizes the specific problems presented by the task, and then makes certain that the student uses a systematic approach to finding solutions to those problems. This recurring association of problems and solutions greatly improves the student's understanding of the course material and it also presents the material in a way that will be useful on the job.

Our Problem/Solution training method allows each student to learn at an optimum level regardless of previous experience or aptitude.

Our competitors' teaching methods are inefficient by design

With a class made up of students at different levels, a traditional lecture period is an inefficient waste of classroom time. If the material being covered is kept light enough for the least advanced students, then the most advanced students will receive little or no benefit from the lecture session. On the other hand, by teaching at a level high enough to challenge the advanced students, the material becomes too demanding for the students at the other end of the scale. In simple terms, a significant amount of inefficiency is inherent in every lecture session. This inefficiency not only limits both the depth and the scope of the material which can be covered in the lecture period, it also reduces the amount of time available for the hands-on lab session which follows. This is an extremely serious drawback since the majority of technicians pay little or no attention to the lecture sessions and tend to concentrate most of their learning effort on the hands-on lab periods instead.

Our Problem/Solution training method overcomes the inefficiency of the traditional Lecture/Lab approach used by most of our competitors. By relying on lengthy lecture periods as a teaching tool, most of our competitors practically guarantee that at least some of their students will go away dissatisfied with the results of the training.

Our teaching method effectively covers incredible amounts of material

Many people who've never seen our Problem/Solution training method in action wonder how we're able to present all of the course material without the use of lectures. In simplest terms, we treat the material on a "need to know" basis. For example, when the first problem which requires the use of floating point memory pops up, then the instructor will discuss floating point memory - but not before. What makes this approach so effective is that the students become intently focused on a specific problem. The instructor makes sure that they fully understand the nature of the problem. Then when the solution is finally presented, the students make a firm mental connection between the problem and the solution. We all know from personal experience that these are the types of lessons which stick best in the human mind. By using simple techniques like this we're able to pack more knowledge into our five-day classes than most colleges are able to cover in a full semester. We frequently hear that particular comparison from students who are amazed at how much they're able to learn, and understand, and remember - all while thoroughly enjoying their time in our classes.

Our Problem/Solution training method allows us to cover incredible amounts of useful material. By matching specific solutions with specific problems, our students are able to learn, understand, and remember much more useful information than is possible with any other method.

Our competitors' teaching methods limit the material they can cover

Most of our competitors use the traditional outline method for presenting their lecture material. First "Topic A" is presented and discussed in detail. Then "Topic B" is presented and discussed in detail. Then "Topic C" and so on. At first glance this looks like an ideal way to organize and present a large amount of information. It certainly makes the instructor's job easier. But although this teaching method introduces a great number of solutions, unfortunately it offers the student little or no guidance into what problems will eventually require those solutions. Imagine sitting through several hours of lecture each day. Somewhere in there might be a discussion of how floating point memory can be used for storing a fractional number. How many students are likely to remember that one specific piece of knowledge when, a day or two later, the need for that knowledge finally comes up?

Our Problem/Solution training method overcomes the natural limitations of the Lecture/Lab approach. Rather than presenting a mass of unrelated information, we target the course material to match the students' precise needs in realistic situations.

Our workshop-style floor plan increases instructor/student interaction

Using our workshop-style floor plan, the workstations are arranged around the perimeter of the room with the students all facing outward. The instructor is now free to circulate around the room and continuously monitor the progress of each student on an individual basis. As the students work through their hands-on lab assignments, the instructor is able to closely monitor the progress of each student. Any student who needs extra help can receive the "over the shoulder" coaching he requires. The instructor can also assign additional lab exercises to keep the more advanced students challenged and involved. The large open area created by our seating arrangement helps with the "group discussion" period which follows each lab assignment. Here all of the students gather around one workstation and discuss the problems which were encountered and the steps which were required to find a solution. By comparing the different approaches used by other students, each member of the group gains a much better understanding of the issues involved in a problem and also how to systematically work out a solution. By carefully monitoring these open discussions, the instructor gains a great deal of insight into how well each student actually comprehends the material that has just been covered.

Our Problem/Solution training method uses a workshop-style floor plan. This arrangement makes it easy for the instructor to continuously monitor and interact with each student.

Our competitors' classroom-style layout limits instructor/student interaction

Most of our competitors use a traditional classroom-style seating arrangement with the student workstations in rows all facing the front of the room. This actually works well for lectures - but during hands-on lab sessions the instructor finds it inconvenient to circulate through the classroom and continuously monitor the progress of each student. Students who require additional help soon fall behind. Other students quickly complete the exercise and soon become bored and disinterested while waiting for their classmates to catch up. Teaching the concepts of problem-solving skills and developing a student's self-confidence require a great deal of continuous personal interaction between the instructor and each student. The traditional classroom-style seating arrangement makes this amount of interaction difficult for the instructor to achieve.

During hands-on lab sessions, our workshop-style floor plan makes it easier for the instructor to monitor and interact with each student than the classroom-style seating arrangement used by most of our competitors.

Want to know more?

The comparisons above are just a few of the differences between our "Problem/Solution" teaching methods and the "training as usual" approach used by just about everyone else. Whether you're a plant maintenance manager looking for effective PLC training for your technicians - or a PLC instructor at an accredited tech school - or a prospective student - if you'd like to know more, please get in touch with us. We'll be happy to discuss our techniques with you by phone, or possibly offer you a chance to sit in on one of our classes for free. This really works! If it didn't, we wouldn't guarantee it.

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