



The Telephone Game and your Procedures Manual



Master Happiness with Marty Jalove

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Importance of a Company Procedures Manual

In any business, consistency and clarity are key to success. A well-documented procedures manual is essential for maintaining uniformity in operations, training new hires, and addressing the many “what ifs” that arise in day-to-day activities.

Many companies fall into the trap of avoiding the creation of comprehensive procedure manuals, operating instead on the assumption that employees inherently understand processes and protocols. This approach often results in fragmented and inconsistent knowledge transfer, where critical details are lost or miscommunicated, much like messages in the Telephone Game.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Some businesses assign the task of writing these manuals to subject matter experts who, while knowledgeable, may inadvertently create documents that are difficult for newcomers to grasp. These manuals are often written from an experienced perspective, overlooking the challenges and questions that a new employee might face. Consequently, this can lead to confusion and a steeper learning curve for new hires, undermining the intended purpose of the manuals.



Solve the 5 main problems with Procedures Manuals

- Not understanding the reasoning
- Assumed knowledge
- No one takes responsibility
- Updating the staff
- We've Always Done It That Way

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The Telephone Game

The Telephone Game is a fun, but illustrative example of how verbal instructions alone can lead to misunderstandings and errors:

1. One person whispers a message to another.
(Example: *“Set the alarm before locking up at night.”*)
2. The second person repeats what they think they heard to a third person.
3. This process continues until the last person in the line hears the message and announces it aloud. (Result: *“Settle Harm Beef Warlock Clean Up Hat Knight!”*)

More often than not, the final message is hilariously different from the original. While amusing in a game setting, this kind of miscommunication can be disastrous in a business environment. Training by word-of-mouth without a manual is akin to playing the Telephone Game, but the results for your business may not be as funny.



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Steps to Creating an Effective Procedures Manual

To ensure your team maintains consistency and efficiency, follow these steps to create a robust and effective procedures manual using the **P-H-O-N-E** method:

P - Purpose

The Manager or Team Leader defines the **PURPOSE** of each section or duty to be documented in the manual. This individual usually possesses the most experience and insight in the tasks at hand and uses, defining the purpose, as the first step in training.

The clear and concise explanation of the purpose for each procedure will allow the new employee to better understand the "WHY" behind each task.



Clearly articulate how to perform each task or duty. It's essential to use precise language and avoid jargon or slang that may not be understood by everyone in the organization. Identify potential outcomes or consequences of not following proper procedures. This step is crucial as it highlights the importance of adhering to established protocols. It will also help employees understand their impact on overall business operations and encourage them to prioritize consistency. Include relevant notes or additional information.

PRO TIP: *The best place to start a Procedures Manual is to create a list of common Industry Terms. You will find that many people have many different terms for the same items or job. Starting with a comprehensive list of preferred terms will help eliminate possible misunderstandings in the future.*

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H - Hurdles

The person learning the task should be responsible for writing the procedures. It is widely believed that writing things down is the best way to absorb and retain new information.

As they learn, they will naturally encounter HURDLES, obstacles, and questions. These hurdles are quite often overlooked by people more familiar with the tasks. By seeking answers from the Team Leader, the new hires can document the most accurate and informative steps. Encourage them to think critically and ask questions that may seem obvious. These potential hurdles can also identify any gaps in the current procedures or highlight areas for improvement.



Once all steps are documented, it's time to set Objectives for each procedure. This step mimics the PURPOSE defined by the Team Leader and outlines the desired outcome of following the procedures accurately. Including measurable objectives helps employees understand their progress and success in completing the tasks. It also allows for accountability and continuous improvement as goals can be adjusted based on performance.

PRO TIP: *To ensure consistency in operations, include additional notes in your manual that address common mistakes, frequently asked questions, or exceptions to standard procedures. This section will serve as a quick reference guide for employees when they encounter challenges while performing these tasks.*

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O - Ownership

The individual writing the manual takes OWNERSHIP of it. They ensure it is always up to date. **Whenever a new obstacle arises, this person must seek out the solution and update the manual accordingly.** As they become more familiar with the tasks, they may even suggest improvements or new procedures for consideration.



By taking ownership of the manual, this person becomes a valuable asset to the team and helps maintain consistency and accuracy in operations. Effective communication is crucial when creating a procedure manual. Regular check-ins and open communication between the writer and Team Leader can help identify any discrepancies or areas for improvement in the procedures. In the end, the writer of the manual should have a thorough understanding of each task being documented.

N - Notification

When updates are made to the manual, it is crucial to NOTIFY all relevant team members. This allows everyone the opportunity to learn, review, and understand the changes. **It also ensures that everyone is following the same procedures and avoids confusion or errors.** A simple email or team meeting can be an effective way to notify employees of changes made to the manual.

PRO TIP: Create a method to highlight changes and additions in the Procedures Manual along with notifications. The goal is to make sure that EVERYONE is aware of updates and can easily find them, learn them, and use them.

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E - Ever Evolving

Lastly, it's essential to recognize that the Company Procedures Manual is a living document. It should EVOLVE continuously, reflecting new insights, changes, and improvements. **Regular reviews ensure it remains a vital training tool for both current employees and new hires.** As the company grows and changes, so should the manual. By continuously evolving, it demonstrates a commitment to staying up-to-date and improving operations.



The Importance of Written Procedures

Creating written procedures for all tasks, especially those that could be delegated to current employees or new hires, is paramount. These procedures should be stored in an electronic document to facilitate easy updates and accessibility.

To maintain consistency, it is essential to standardize procedures across all departments and teams. This will ensure that tasks are completed in the same manner, regardless of who is performing them. It also makes training new employees more efficient as they can refer to the standardized manual for guidance. The procedure manual should be easily accessible to all relevant employees. This could be in a physical binder or stored electronically on a shared drive.

Creating and maintaining a Company Procedures Manual is crucial for successful operations. It provides consistency, accuracy, and efficiency in the workplace. By following the P.H.O.N.E. Method of purpose, hurdles, ownership, notification, and evolution, companies can ensure their manuals remain effective training tools for years to come.

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Checking the Reliability of Your New Manual

After the initial training, every time a new hire has a question, they should be encouraged to look for the answer in the manual. This practice not only reinforces the training but also promotes independence among new employees. If the answer is found within the manual, the new hire will learn without pulling someone else away from their other tasks, thereby maintaining productivity across the team.

However, if the answer is not found in the manual, it's a sign that the manual needs updating. Using the P.H.O.N.E. process, new information should be added, just as the manual was originally written, but now with a new writer and owner. This ensures that the manual remains accurate, comprehensive, and a reliable resource for all employees. By continuously updating the manual based on real-world queries and scenarios, companies can maintain an up-to-date training tool that evolves with the needs of the business.



Ensure the success and consistency of your team by developing a comprehensive procedures manual today. Train your team effectively, and watch your business thrive.

PRO TIP: *The first duty of every new employee is to take ownership of the Procedures Manual and learn to follow the steps of keeping it up-to-date. The Procedures Manual should be one of the most important tools in your arsenal for training new hires.*

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Marty Jalove of Master Happiness is a Corporate Coach, Business Consultant, and Marketing Strategist that helps small businesses, teams, and individuals find focus, feel fulfilled, and have fun. Master Happiness stresses the importance of realistic goal setting, empowerment, and accountability in order to encourage employee and customer engagement and retention.



The secret is simple:
Happy Employees attract Happy Customers
and Happy Customers come back with Friends.

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