

Chapter 8: Creating the Environment for Training and Production

A key to effective training, learning, and production on the construction site is the environment created by the construction manager and construction trainers as well as the relationships they establish with the participants. The following suggestions will help create a positive learning and production environment.

Know the Participants

To teach effectively, it is important to pay careful attention to the audience. The following are some of the things to keep in mind about YouthBuild participants:

- Most have had negative experiences with formal education and teachers
- Most will have had little or no construction or work experience
- Many are challenged by weaknesses in basic academic skills such as reading and math
- Some may have learning disabilities
- Some will have little aptitude for construction work
- Many have had few caring adults in their lives

It is often helpful to try to find out something about them as individuals during the course of the program from teachers and counselors. What are their other interests? What do teachers know about the level of their learning skills? Participants can differ considerably in their learning styles. Some like to see what's being taught, while others prefer to hear it. Some like to ask questions first, whereas others like to plunge right into a task. The important thing to remember is that there are many ways to take in information, so it is crucial to present all information in a blended teaching approach that incorporates visual, auditory and tactile learning methods. Most people have a few methods that they favor and others that they find ineffective.

Create Motivation

Knowing the participants is essential to motivating them, and motivating them is essential to their ability to learn. Motivating participants means giving them reasons to listen and exert themselves. Some suggested ways to motivate participants on the construction site are to:

- Be enthusiastic about what is being done and taught, and convey that enthusiasm to the participants
- Have outside professionals talk to participants about pathways to success
- Have graduates speak to current participants about the rewards of the YouthBuild program
- See the participants not as who they are, but as who they can be, and hold that picture out to them
- Put their work in the broad context of the construction project, the job, the educational opportunities it will enhance, and their role in contributing to their community



- Provide opportunities for participants to demonstrate leadership skills
- Give participants the responsibility to teach each other
- Set high standards for workmanship and acknowledge and reward it when those standards are achieved
- Give and ask for feedback

Engaging participants and motivating them is usually harder than effectively managing the construction process. Forming a relevant relationship is essential for construction trainers to have the credibility needed to motivate the participants and the empathy to deal with the issues the participants bring as young people. A relevant relationship is one that fosters growth and learning in the participant. To help with building such relationships, staff should make efforts to:

- Build trust by being dependable and consistent; respect confidentiality and be mature and aware of feelings.
- Communicate in a way that is not ambiguous. Saying one thing but sending a different message through tone of voice, facial expression or other nonverbal communication is confusing and creates distrust.
- Let the participants be themselves. Do not expect them to be just like staff. Accept them without judgement while providing empathy.
- See each participant as an individual in the process of transformation and think about how the staff can contribute to the transformation.

YouthBuild staff are role models for youth in the program whether they want to be or not. The example they set should be conducive to both the participant's personal growth and the development of the participant's skills.

Foster Cooperation and Interdependence

A construction project is a team experience. Learning to work as a member of a team is a critical aspect of the YouthBuild construction experience and one that may be difficult for some participants. However, it is important to learn that cooperation is much more expedient, safe, and productive than working as competitive, autonomous individuals. The construction process can demonstrate how different trades and stages of construction are dependent on one another and the mishaps that can occur when cooperation is lacking.

In order to facilitate cooperation and interdependence, construction trainers can structure group activities that give participants practice in developing teamwork skills.

Cooperative learning can also be encouraged by having participants:

- Demonstrate skills to each other for review
- Write instructions for each other to follow
- Make videotaped demonstrations for other participants to study
- Make suggestions for improving teamwork
- Assess each week's work in terms of teamwork displayed by group and individuals

Create a Problem-Solving Atmosphere

The construction site can either have a problem-solving atmosphere which enhances learning or an atmosphere in which the participants feel that the staff have all the answers. Creating a problem-solving atmosphere depends on the way construction trainers introduce information and how they create opportunities for participant involvement in the construction process. A problem-solving atmosphere is fostered by creating opportunities for generating questions, by encouraging participants to come up with their own ideas for solving problems, and by creating opportunities for participants to act on and experiment with problems and solutions they have posed.

Construction staff can help the participants develop problem-solving skills on the work site by:

- Frequently posing problems and asking participants to solve them
- Setting up problems that have multiple answers to encourage creative thinking and to emphasize that there is often more than one right answer to a problem
- Asking questions such as:
 - What do we need to know to do this?
 - How are we going to do this?
 - What other tools could be used?
 - What other methods or techniques could we use?
 - Why isn't this working?
- Halting work when it is not going well and asking the participants as a group to find a solution

Establish Conditions for Production

In addition to creating an environment for training and learning, construction trainers must also create an environment that allows production to be achieved within the time available. The keys to creating an environment for production are clear and consistent structure and instructions.