

## Eric P. Bloom: **6 Ways to use job shadowing as a training technique**



**By Eric P. Bloom**  
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By its name, job shadowing may, at first glance, sound mysterious or secretive. Well, sorry, it's not. Job shadowing is the process of observing someone in the workplace with the specific goal of trying to understand what they do. Classically, job shadowing is used by students as a way of learning about a profession they are considering studying in school and potentially pursuing as their future livelihood. Take note, that this technique also can be used extremely effectively within the workplace and a low cost training tool in the following ways.

### **To teach job candidates about the tasks they will be performing if hired**

Using job shadowing as a component of hiring has three major advantages. First, it gives the job candidate a chance to see what life will be like in the workplace on a daily basis if he/she decides to accept the job. Second, it gives the company a chance to see the candidate within the workplace and can thus gain a better understanding of his/her ability to perform the job if hired. Third, it allows both the candidate and the company to see if there is a personality fit.

### **To teach new employees how to perform standardized tasks**

All too often, new employees don't receive the amount of training they need to get up to speed quickly on the new tasks they must perform. One main reason for this training deficiency is that other people in the department don't have the time to properly train newcomers to the group because they are too busy doing their own work. Because by definition, Job shadowing is

watching someone else do their job, the new employee can learn by watching while the experienced employee is getting his/her work done. Of course, there is the potential that questions from the new recruit may slow down the experienced person by asking questions, but this question/answer dialog will be less disruptive for the experienced person than putting his/her work aside to provide formalized on-the-job instruction.

### **To teach new tasks to existing employees as part of a job rotation program**

This concept is similar to the one mentioned above, except instead of trying to train a newly hired employee, you are trying to train an existing employee how to perform a new task. The reason that job shadowing can work well as a cross training tool is because by requiring the employee to watch the task and not do the task, it indirectly gives him/her permission to not be immediately functionally productive, thus allowing him/her to gain an understanding of the job before being thrown into the fray to do it themselves.

### **To teach customer service people how their customers use the company's products**

Using job shadowing as a way to enhance the company's external client service could almost be called "A day in the life of your customer training." The concept here is that the better your customer service and/or technical support staff understand what the customer does with your product, the better job they can do providing assistance to your client base. For example, let's say you work for a software company that provides accounting software to doctors' offices. The better your technical support staff understand how a doctor's office works, the better they can explain how it should be used.

### **To teach internal service providers about the internal departments they are supporting**

This use of job shadowing is similar to the one mentioned above, but in this case, the people being helped are inside, rather than outside the company. This distinction not only allows the people in one department to better serve another department, but from a company perspective, it can greatly enhance the efficiency of inter-department company processes. For example, let's say step #1 of a company's billing process is performed by the Shipping Department and step #2 is done by the Accounting Office, based on the paperwork received from Shipping. If the people working in Shipping have a general understanding of how the paperwork is processed within

Accounting, they can better complete this paperwork in a way that facilitates proper processing by the accountants. Conversely, if the people in Accounting have a general understanding of the shipping process, they can provide meaningful suggestions as to how the paperwork can be designed in a way that minimizes the Shipping Department's paperwork and simultaneously maximizes the Accounting Department's efficiency.

### **To help employees explore alternative future career options**

Lastly, this use of job shadowing is very similar to its original, and more traditional, definition. The difference here is that you are helping your employees, rather than students, make informed career decisions on the future direction of their professional life.

In closing, as a manager, consider job shadowing as one of the many tools you use when training new employees, working to enhance your department effectiveness, and when helping those in your group navigate their careers. The beauty of this technique is that it's low cost, easy to administer, and can be highly effective.

The primary advice and takeaways from today's column is to know that:

- Job shadowing is the process of observing someone in the workplace with the specific goal of trying to understanding what they do.
- Using job shadowing as a training technique can be low cost, easy to administer, and can be highly effective.

Until next time, manage well, manage smart, and continue to grow.

### **Author Bio:**

Eric P. Bloom, based in Ashland, MA, is the president and founder of Manager Mechanics LLC, a company specializing in Information Technology (IT) leadership development and the governing organization for the ITMLP© and ITMLE© certifications. He is also a nationally syndicated columnist, keynote speaker, and author of the award winning book "Manager Mechanics: Tips and Advice for First-Time Managers." Contact him at [eric@ManagerMechanics.com](mailto:eric@ManagerMechanics.com), follow him on Twitter at @EricPBloom, or visit [www.ManagerMechanics.com](http://www.ManagerMechanics.com).

