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The Business Training System

Most businesses do not lack hard-working people. They lack a way of making sure those people were actually taught the work. The owner knows how everything should be done, so the knowledge lives in the owner's head. A new person is shown a few things on their first shift and learns the rest by watching, asking, and making mistakes. That works only while the person who remembers is standing there. The Business Training System is the answer to that problem. It is a simple, steady way of making sure every person learns every job they are responsible for, to a known standard, with a record that it happened.

Think of it the way you would think of a set of connected parts, because that is exactly what it is. There is a list of who works for you. There is a plain statement of what each job is responsible for and what "done right" looks like. There are the written trainings themselves, kept in one library. There are assignments that say who must learn what, and by when. And there are records that prove the training happened and show you where the gaps still are. Remove any one part and the others weaken. A library nobody is assigned to read is a bookshelf. Assignments nobody records are errands. Records nobody reviews are old paper. The value is in how the parts hand work to each other.

This system helps owners of small and growing businesses most of all, because small businesses feel every gap at once: the day off that goes wrong, the resignation that takes a whole job's knowledge out the door, the customer who gets three different answers from three different workers. It also helps team leaders, trainers, and any worker who has ever been blamed for a mistake nobody taught them to avoid. You do not need special software, a training department, or a big budget. You need a notebook or a folder, a few honest hours of writing, and the discipline to keep the loop running: list the people, map the work, write the trainings, assign them, record them, and review what the records tell you.

Why does it matter now? Because work changes faster than memory does. Prices change, tools change, rules change, people come and go. A business that runs on memory has to be re-taught by accident, one correction at a time, usually in front of a customer. A business that runs on a training system absorbs change calmly: the training is updated, the update is assigned, the completion is recorded. By the end of this topic you will know how to build all five parts of the system, how to write a training a new person can actually follow, how to teach a skill so it sticks, and how to keep the whole system alive across a full year instead of letting it fade after one good month.

What You Will Learn

- Why a business that runs on memory breaks whenever the person who remembers is absent, and what training protects: quality, time, money, and people.
- The five parts of every working training system — the Roster, Roles and Standards, the Training Library, Assignments, and Records — and what breaks when any one part is missing.

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- How to break a job into tasks and write a standard for each task, so "done right" is something a new person can see and match.
- How to write a short training in plain language: one training, one subject, finished in one sitting, with steps in order and warnings in the right place.
- How to teach a skill in four steps — explain, show, let them try, watch and correct — and why practice matters more than the lesson itself.
- How assignments with honest due dates turn a library from reading material into learning that actually happens.
- How simple records and a monthly review prove training happened, expose gaps early, and close the loop.
- How refreshers, updates, and a yearly rhythm keep skills alive after the first training is long over.

Lesson 1 — Why Training Cannot Live in One Person's Head

Every training system starts with a hard truth: if the knowledge lives in one person's head, the business does not own that knowledge — it borrows it, and the loan can be called in any day. The owner gets sick. The best worker resigns. The manager takes a holiday. On that day, the business discovers which jobs were only ever taught by presence, and it discovers it in front of customers.

Picture a small café with six workers. The owner, Rosa, knows exactly how everything should be done: how the coffee machine is cleaned, how the till is counted at close, how regular customers are greeted. None of it is written down, and none of it is taught the same way twice. When Rosa hires someone, she shows them a few things on their first shift. After that, they learn by watching and by being corrected. On Rosa's day off, the machine is cleaned a different way and a part wears out months early. A new worker guesses at the till procedure and the count comes up short. A regular is greeted coldly by someone who was never told that regulars are greeted by name. Rosa spends her days correcting, re-explaining, and apologising. She is not running a business. She is carrying one, in her head, and it is heavy.

Training is the act of making sure the people who do the work know how the work is supposed to be done — before they do it, not after it goes wrong. When training is in place, four things get protected. Quality is protected, because the work comes out the same way no matter who does it, and the customer's experience stops depending on luck. Time is protected, because nobody has to stop and hunt for someone to ask, and the owner stops spending hours re-teaching the same points. Money is protected, because mistakes are expensive — wasted materials, refunds, rework, lost customers — and trained people make fewer of them. And people are protected, because workers who are trained feel competent and calm, while workers left to guess feel stupid and stressed, and the good ones leave first because they have options. High turnover is very often a training problem wearing a disguise.

It also helps to be honest about what a training system is not. It is not a binder. Many businesses own a thick manual nobody reads and nobody updates; material sitting on a shelf is

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not a system, because a system is alive — it assigns, tracks, checks, and refreshes. It is not a single event. A one-day course, however good, fades within weeks if nothing surrounds it. It is not punishment. In weak businesses, "training" is what happens to people who messed up, and that poisons the word for everyone. And it is not common sense. The moment someone says "that's just common sense," a training gap has been found. Common sense is what people call things they learned so long ago they forgot they learned them. Your new hire does not have your years. What is obvious to you must be taught to them.

The costs of guessing are real, and they arrive in five currencies. Rework: work done wrong must be done again, at double cost for single earnings. Waste: wrong product, wrong measure, wrong setting, consumed quietly and constantly. Refunds and repairs: putting a mistake right after it reaches the customer always costs more than doing it right first, because now it includes apology, urgency, and often a discount. Lost customers: most people who receive bad work do not complain — they leave, and they tell people, so the true cost is every future purchase multiplied by everyone they tell. And lost people: replacing a worker — advertising, interviewing, covering shifts, slow first months — is one of the largest costs a small business carries. One honest page of arithmetic on your own most common mistake usually ends the argument about whether training is worth paying for. Every business pays for training. The only choice is whether it pays on purpose, in planned hours, or by accident, in mistakes.

The Steps

1. Answer the absence question in writing: if you could not come in for two weeks, which three jobs would go wrong first, and why?
2. Next to each job, write honestly whether the person doing it was ever actually taught how you want it done — taught, not just told once, and not just expected to know.
3. Price one common mistake in your business: the rework time, the wasted materials, any refund or discount, and the future business likely lost. Write the total down.
4. Write the definition where you will see it: a training system is the connected parts a business uses to make sure every person learns every job they are responsible for, to a known standard, with a record that it happened.
5. Score your business from 1 to 5 on each part of that definition: connected parts, every person and every job, a known standard, a record. Do not defend the scores — they are your starting map.
6. Choose the single most critical job in your business. That job is where you will build first, in the lessons that follow.

A Worked Example

Two home-cleaning companies each employ eight cleaners. Company A trains by shadowing: a new cleaner follows an experienced one for two days, then works alone. Company B uses a simple training system: a written checklist for each type of clean, a trainer who demonstrates each task once, supervised practice, and a sign-off when the new cleaner can do the full clean to standard. Three months later, Company A is fielding complaints — missed bathrooms, wrong

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products on wooden floors, keys left in the wrong place. Each complaint costs a free re-clean and sometimes the client. Company B's complaint rate is a fraction of that, because every cleaner was taught the same standard and checked against it before working alone. Company B did not hire better people. It trained ordinary people properly. That is the whole point of this system: it makes average hiring produce reliable work, because the reliability lives in the system, not in luck.

Common Mistakes

- **Assuming experience equals readiness.** A worker with ten years in the trade may still do the job a different way than your business requires. Experience must be checked against your standards, not trusted blindly.
- **Training only when something goes wrong.** Correction after a failure is the most expensive and least effective kind of training. The system exists to move teaching before the failure.
- **Believing you are too small to need a system.** A business with three workers needs training just as much as one with three hundred. The system is simpler, but the need is identical.
- **Calling a binder or a single course a system.** Material and events are parts at best. Without assignments and records, nothing guarantees anyone learned anything.
- **Blaming people for gaps in the system.** When three workers do a task three different ways, the first question is whether they were ever taught one way — not which of them is careless.

Lesson 2 — The Five Parts of the System

Every functioning training system — in a two-person workshop or a two-thousand-person company — is built from the same five parts. Learn to see them and you can diagnose almost any training problem in minutes, because nearly every training failure is one missing part, or one broken handoff between parts.

Part 1 is the Roster: a current list of the people on your team — names, roles, and start dates. This sounds too simple to matter. It matters because training is assigned to people, tracked per person, and reviewed per person. If the list of people is wrong or missing, everything built on it wobbles. A training roster needs only a few facts per person: full name, role, start date, and any note that affects training, such as part-time days, a second shift, or a return from leave. It is not a personnel file. It does not need addresses, pay rates, or personal details, and it should not collect them, because the roster will be looked at often and should hold only what training decisions require. Keep it current by tying updates to events: add a person the day their offer is accepted, update the role the day it changes, mark someone "left" with a date rather than deleting them — their records stay attached to their name — and scan the whole list for five minutes once a month.

Part 2 is Roles and Standards. For each role, you write a plain statement of what that role is responsible for, broken into tasks, with a standard for each task: what done-right looks like. This

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is the map of what must be learned, and Lesson 3 builds it in full. Without it, every trainer teaches their own habits instead of the business's way, and every trainer teaches a slightly different job.

Part 3 is the Training Library: the trainings themselves — the written instructions, demonstrations, checklists, and lessons your business teaches from. The library is your business's memory, the place where "how we do it here" lives outside anybody's head. Lesson 4 covers how to write trainings that belong in it. Without a library, knowledge retires, resigns, and goes on holiday, and every new person is trained from someone else's memory of someone else's memory, degrading like a photocopy of a photocopy.

Part 4 is Assignments: the decisions that connect people to trainings — who must complete which training, and by when. Without assignments, a library is just reading material and a roster is just a list. Assignments turn the system from passive to active. Part 5 is Records: proof, per person, of what training was completed and when, plus the reports that let you see the whole picture at a glance — who is trained, who is overdue, where the gaps are. Without records, nobody can prove anything, and the owner cannot tell a trained team from an untrained one until the work speaks — by which time it has spoken to the customer first.

The parts form a loop. The roster and roles define who must learn what. The library holds how it is taught. Assignments schedule the learning. Records prove it happened and expose what is missing — and those gaps send you back to the roster and roles with better information. This is why partial builds disappoint their owners. A business that writes beautiful trainings but never assigns them concludes that "staff won't read anything." A business that assigns diligently but never records concludes that "the paperwork is endless and proves nothing." In both cases, one part is being blamed for a missing connection. When training underperforms, check the handoffs first: what was this part supposed to receive, and what was it supposed to hand on? Nine times in ten, the failure lives there.

Build the parts in the order they depend on each other: roster first — it takes under an hour and anchors everything — then roles and standards for your most critical job, then the library for that job, then assignments, then records. You do not need the whole system before any of it works. One job, fully covered by all five parts, is a working system at small scale, and it is the template you then repeat for every other job.

The Steps

1. Build the roster on one page: every person's name, role or roles, start date, and any note that affects their training. Build it from the schedule and the floor, not from memory at your desk.

2. Date the roster itself — write "updated on" and the date at the top — and name one person who owns keeping it current.

3. Draw five boxes and label them: Roster — Roles and Standards — Library — Assignments — Records. Under each, write one honest line about what exists in your business today.

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4. Circle the emptiest box. That is your first building site.

5. Take your most critical job and walk it through all five parts on paper: who does it, what it includes, what training exists for it, who has been assigned that training, and what record proves completion.

6. Fix the weakest handoff for that one job this week — an assignment never made, a completion never recorded, a record never read — before building anything new.

A Worked Example

A bakery has a roster, clear roles, and a folder of good written trainings — but no assignments and no records. The owner assumes the folder gets read. In fact, of five counter staff, two have read the allergen-information training and three have not, and nobody knows which two. The system looks complete and is not: Parts 4 and 5 are missing, so Parts 1 to 3 produce no guarantee. One customer question about allergens, answered wrongly by an untrained worker, is all it would take to show the gap. The fix is not a better folder. It is the two missing parts: assign the training to all five staff by Friday, and record each completion with a date. Notice the same pattern in a garden-maintenance firm that does have all five parts: a new starter, Ben, is added to the roster before his first shift; his role's task list points to three short trainings in the library; his trainer assigns them across his first week, staggered around real jobs so he practises each one the same day he learns it; and by Friday three completions sit in the record — which immediately shows that the chemical-handling training is still owed, so it is scheduled before his first solo round rather than discovered after it. Nothing heroic happened. Every part simply handed something to the next.

Common Mistakes

- **Building the roster from memory.** Memory forgets exactly the people the roster exists to catch: the weekend worker, the seasonal helper, the recent starter.
- **Keeping separate lists per supervisor.** Two lists become two truths. One roster, one owner, one place it lives.
- **Collecting personal details the roster does not need.** A roster is for training decisions. Leave pay, addresses, and private details out of it.
- **Writing trainings before mapping roles.** Without roles and standards, trainers write about their own habits, and the library fills with personal styles instead of the business's way.
- **Letting the perfect defeat the done.** A simple, accurate list on one page beats an elaborate spreadsheet that is three months out of date.

Lesson 3 — Roles, Tasks, and Standards: Mapping the Work Before You Teach It

You cannot train what you have not defined. Before any training is written, the work itself must be mapped: what each role is responsible for, what tasks that responsibility breaks into, and what standard each task must meet. This lesson builds that map. It is unglamorous work, and it is the work everything else stands on, because a training written against a vague role teaches a

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vague job.

Start with roles, not people. A role is a job's responsibilities, whoever currently holds it. Write a responsibility statement for each role: a short paragraph, in plain words, naming what that role owns. For example: "The Counter Assistant is responsible for greeting customers, taking orders accurately, handling payments, keeping the counter area clean and stocked, and knowing where to send any question they cannot answer." Read your statements looking for two findings. The first is overlap: two roles both believing they own the same task usually means it gets done twice or argued over. The second is the orphan: a task everybody assumes somebody else owns, which in practice means nobody owns it until it fails. Both findings are gifts. They are cheaper to fix on paper than in front of a customer.

Next, break each role into tasks. A task is the trainable unit: one piece of work with a clear start, a clear finish, and a result you can check. "Run the shop" is not a task. "Open the shop: unlock, lights, till float counted and recorded, displays checked" is a task. Break big tasks down until each piece passes the sizing test: a competent person could be taught this one piece in one sitting, and you could watch them do it and say yes or no — that met the standard, or it did not. Watch the real work while you break it down. Sit with the job, list every task in the order it happens, note the tools, materials, and information each task needs, and ask the people who do it what they get wrong most and what new people fear most. The expert trap waits here: your best worker may do a task beautifully and be unable to explain it, because their knowledge has gone automatic. Interview them slowly — "what did you just check? why that order? what would go wrong if you skipped that?" — and write down what they say. You are documenting the way your business really works, which sometimes differs from the way you thought it worked. When the written way and the real way differ, find out why before you train either one: sometimes the real way is an improvement to adopt, and sometimes it is a shortcut that will eventually cost you.

Finally, write the standard for each important task. A standard says what "done right" looks like in words a new person can use. Good standards cover three kinds of things: the result (what finished looks like), the quality (how good is good enough — measures, counts, appearance), and the safety and rules that surround the task (what must never happen, what must always happen). Write standards with numbers and names where you can: not "keep it tidy" but "counter wiped, stock faced forward, no more than two items waiting to be shelved." Standards end arguments, because two people can disagree about an opinion but can both check work against a written standard. When two standards seem to conflict — speed against carefulness, for example — decide the priority in advance and write it into the standard itself, so the worker is never left guessing which rule to break.

The finished map is short enough to use: one page per job, listing the role's responsibilities, its tasks in order, and the standard for each key task. That page becomes the training map — the list from which trainings are chosen, in priority order: safety and rules first, then the few tasks that matter most to customers and money, then everything else. Not every task needs a full written training on day one. Every task needs to be on the map, so nothing is invisible.

The Steps

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1. List every role in your business using the names your business actually uses. Note anyone who holds two roles — they need the training for each.

2. Write a responsibility statement for each role: one short paragraph naming what that role owns, in plain words.

3. Read all the statements together. Mark overlaps, where two roles claim the same task, and orphans, where a real task belongs to no role. Assign every orphan to a role.

4. For your most critical role, watch the work being done and list every task in the order it happens, with the tools, materials, and information each task needs.

5. Break any task that is too big to teach in one sitting into smaller tasks, until each piece has a clear start, a clear finish, and a checkable result.

6. Interview the person who does each key task best. Ask what they check, why the order matters, and what goes wrong when a step is skipped. Write down their answers.

7. Write a standard for each key task: the finished result, the quality level with numbers where possible, and the safety or rule points that must always or never happen.

8. Put it on one page per job: responsibilities, tasks in order, standards. Mark which tasks need training first: safety and rules, then the tasks customers and money depend on most.

A Worked Example

A vehicle-repair shop owner, Daniel, sits down to map the Mechanic role and discovers his roster work and role work collide: his apprentice, listed as "started in June," had actually started the previous June — a full year of assumed progress rested on a wrong date. Correcting the roster, he then watches a full service job and lists twenty-three tasks where he would have guessed "about ten." Interviewing his senior mechanic, Priya, he finds the real gold: before returning any car, Priya does a quiet four-point check — fluid caps, wheel-nut torque marks, lights, and a glance under the car — that nobody ever taught her and she never thought to mention. It is simply "what she does." Daniel writes it into the task list as its own task, with its own standard: all four points checked, in that order, before keys are handed back, every car, no exceptions. Within a month, that one mapped task — invisible before the mapping — is the shop's most-valued training, because it catches the small oversights that used to become comebacks. The map did not just organise the work. It found the work nobody knew was being done.

Common Mistakes

• **Training the person instead of the role.** People change; roles remain. Define the job first, then support the person learning it.

• **Leaving tasks at headline size.** "Handle customers" cannot be taught or checked. Break work down until each task can be shown, practised, and judged.

• **Writing standards as opinions.** "Do a good job" is not a standard. A standard describes the finished result so clearly that two people checking the same work reach the same verdict.

• **Skipping the interview with your best worker.** The most valuable steps are often the automatic ones the expert no longer notices. Ask slowly, and write down what they actually

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do.

• **Mapping once and never updating.** Work changes. When a task, tool, or rule changes, update the map the same week, or the map quietly becomes fiction.

Lesson 4 — Writing Trainings and Teaching Them: Show, Practice, Correct

A training is a self-contained piece of teaching that takes one person from not knowing to able to do, for one subject. This lesson covers both halves of making one: how to write it so a new person can follow it, and how to teach it live so the skill actually sticks. The two halves share one rule: respect the reader and the learner by being clear, short, and concrete.

Begin with the result. Before writing a word, answer one question: when this training is finished, what will the person be able to do? Write that answer at the top. It disciplines everything below it. Then honour the oldest rule in this system: one training, one subject. The training that tries to cover opening, closing, payments, complaints, and cleaning in a single document teaches none of them well, because the reader cannot hold it, the trainer cannot check it, and the record cannot say what "done" means. If a subject is genuinely big, split it into a short sequence of small trainings, each with its own title that tells the truth about its contents — "Counting the Till at Close," not "Finance Stuff." A title passes the naming test when a new person, reading only the title, knows whether this is the training they need.

Keep each training short enough to finish in one sitting. Length decides completion: a training that takes twenty minutes gets finished; a training that takes three hours gets started. Inside the training, use the anatomy that works everywhere: a short opening saying what this is and why it matters, the steps in order — the backbone of all instruction — with numbers, measures, and named places instead of vague words, warnings placed before the step they protect rather than buried at the end, the reason behind any rule that people are tempted to skip, and a checkpoint where the learner confirms they can do the key part. Write in plain language: short sentences, everyday words, the names your business actually uses. Jargon is an insider tax — every unexplained insider word charges the new person a fee of confusion. Write for the newest reader you will ever have, then test the training with the cold-read test: hand it to someone who has never done the task and watch them follow it without your help. Every place they hesitate, guess, or ask is a place the writing failed, not the reader. Fix the writing. Store finished trainings in the library where people can find them in under a minute, grouped in a sensible order, each carrying a version number and date so everyone knows which copy is current, and retire outdated versions instead of letting two ways circulate.

Writing is only half the job, because some knowledge only travels by eye and by hand. Teaching a skill live follows four steps. Step one, explain it: what the task is, why it matters, and what done-right looks like, using the written training and its standard. Step two, show it slowly: do the task at teaching speed, talking while you demonstrate — naming each check and each decision out loud, because the learner cannot see your thinking unless you say it. Step three, let them try: the learner does the task while you watch, with a safety net — real work, but supervised, on a task where a mistake can be caught and corrected without harm. Step four, watch, correct,

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and repeat: correct one point at a time, kindly and specifically — what was right, what to change, and let them do it again — because a mistake corrected once is information, while a mistake repeated becomes a habit. Have the learner talk the task back to you as they do it; a person who can say the steps while doing them owns the skill in a way a silent copier does not.

Two judgements separate good trainers from frustrated ones. The first is how much practice is enough: enough is when the learner has done the task correctly, more than once, without prompting — accuracy first, speed later, always in that order, because fast wrong work is just wrong work delivered sooner. The second is when to step in and when to let them struggle: step in instantly where safety, money, or a customer is at risk; let them struggle briefly where the only cost is a minute of thinking, because that struggle is where judgement grows. Training is also where questions belong. A learner's questions are not interruptions; they are the training revealing its own gaps in real time, and a trainer who welcomes them learns what to fix in the written version.

The Steps

1. For one task from your map, write the result first: "After this training, the person can ___ to this standard: ___." Keep the training to that one subject.
2. Give it a truthful title that names the task, and check it would still make sense to someone on their first day.
3. Write the steps in order, with real numbers, names, and places. Put each warning immediately before the step it protects, and add the reason behind any rule people are tempted to skip.
4. Add a checkpoint: one point where the learner must show or state the key part before moving on.
5. Cold-read test it: hand it to someone who has never done the task, watch silently while they follow it, and note every hesitation. Fix the writing at every hesitation.
6. Date it, give it a version number, and file it in the library where it can be found in under a minute. Remove or clearly retire any older version.
7. Teach it live using the four steps: explain, show slowly while talking through your checks, let the learner try on real supervised work, then watch, correct one point at a time, and repeat.
8. Sign the learner off only when they have done the task correctly more than once without prompting — and record it, as the next lesson describes.

A Worked Example

A small insurance office needs its five-person team to handle a new claims process. The first attempt is an event: a three-hour Saturday session covering the whole process at once. By the following Friday, staff are improvising, and the two most complex steps are being skipped entirely. The owner, Anita, rebuilds it as a system. She writes six short trainings, one per stage of the process, each tested by having the newest team member, Callum, follow the draft cold while she watches in silence. His three hesitations become three rewrites — a missing measure,

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an unnamed screen, a warning that arrived one step too late. She then teaches each training live across three weeks: twenty minutes of explain-and-show, followed the same day by supervised practice on real claims, with a one-page checklist at every desk drawn from the written standards. A ten-minute refresher opens week four. A month later the process is being followed accurately, and the checklist is still in use. Same team, same trainer, similar content. The difference was never the teaching talent. It was writing one subject at a time, testing the writing on a real reader, and wrapping every lesson in practice.

Common Mistakes

- **Covering everything in one training.** Big trainings get started, not finished, and nobody can say what completion means. One training, one subject.
- **Writing for yourself instead of the newest reader.** If a first-week worker cannot follow it cold, it is not finished — no matter how clear it seems to you.
- **Burying warnings at the end.** A warning protects only if it arrives before the step where the harm happens.
- **Teaching by telling only.** Some knowledge only travels by eye and hand. Show it slowly, talk through your checks, then let them try.
- **Correcting everything at once.** A learner flooded with ten corrections keeps none of them. One point at a time, then let them repeat the task.
- **Signing off after one lucky success.** One correct attempt can be luck. Sign off on repeated, unprompted, correct work.

Lesson 5 — Assignments, Records, and Refreshers: Keeping the System Alive All Year

A system is a system because it keeps running after the enthusiasm of building it fades. Three habits do that work: assignments that schedule learning, records that prove it, and refreshers that keep skills alive. This lesson builds all three, then puts them on a yearly rhythm — because training that is not assigned does not happen, training that is not recorded cannot be proved, and training that is never refreshed quietly expires.

An assignment is a simple, complete sentence in management form: who, what, by when. Assign training by role first — everyone in a role gets that role's required trainings — and then by person, for gaps, changes, and growth. Keep three honest categories: required training, which a person must complete to do their role safely and correctly; recommended training, which improves the work; and optional training, which feeds interest and ambition. Confusing the categories breeds resentment in both directions — required work treated as optional gets skipped, and optional work treated as required feels like control. Set due dates people can actually meet: training time is work time, scheduled inside the working pattern, not homework added on top of an already full day. Stagger assignments so the business still runs — a whole team in training on the same morning is a closed business — and protect the time once set. A due date missed is information, not automatically a discipline matter: find out whether the cause was time, confusion, or avoidance, extend the date openly when the cause is honest, and build

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a short catch-up plan rather than letting the gap silently become permanent. New rules, new tools, and mistakes all generate assignments too: when the business changes, the assignment list is how the change reaches every person, and when a mistake reveals a gap, assigning the training — without blame — is how the system learns.

Records are the proof layer, and they obey one blunt rule: if it is not recorded, it did not happen. A useful training record shows, per person, what training was completed, when it was finished, and any score or sign-off attached. Keep one record per person, kept where you can find it, with honest handling of the in-between states: partial completion recorded as partial, a failed check recorded plainly with the retake plan beside it, and mistakes in the record corrected openly — never quietly rewritten, because a record people suspect of being polished stops being trusted by everyone, including you. Once a month, turn the records into a one-page report and actually read it: who is trained, who is overdue, where the gaps cluster. The report is where the system talks back to you. Gaps that cluster around one training usually mean the training is broken, not the people. Gaps that cluster around one shift usually mean a scheduling problem. Completion rates mean little alone; read them beside the quality of the work itself. Keep records for as long as your business's obligations require, keep personal information in them to the minimum training decisions need, and back the file up — the training record is a business asset, and losing it means losing your only proof.

Refreshers exist because skills fade. Memory decays on a predictable curve: unpractised learning is mostly gone within weeks, and the fragments that survive are often the easiest parts, not the most important ones. So the system schedules its own maintenance. Set a refresher interval for every important training — shorter for rare, critical, and safety-related tasks, longer for daily work that practises itself. A good refresher is short: review, do not reteach — a demonstration watched once, a checklist walked through, a drill for the emergency you hope never happens. Refreshers are also triggered by events: a rule change, new equipment, a product change, a mistake, or a customer complaint each name the training that needs updating and re-assigning. When you update a training, version it, announce the change in a way people actually hear, and retire the old way explicitly — one current way, everywhere, is the standard. Retraining is done without blame: the worker who resists retraining is often protecting their pride, and a system that treats refreshers as normal for everyone — owner included — removes the sting entirely.

Put it all on a yearly rhythm and the system runs itself: a monthly five-minute roster scan and record check, a monthly read of the one-page report, refreshers and seasonal tasks placed on a training calendar, and one honest annual review — what the records say worked, where the gaps are, which trainings to retire or merge, and what next year's calendar must hold. Short and regular beats long and rare, in maintenance as in teaching. That rhythm, more than any single document, is what makes this a system instead of an event.

The Steps

1. Build your assignment list: for each role, list its required trainings; mark each as required, recommended, or optional, and never blur the three.

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2. Assign by name with a due date each person can actually meet inside their working hours. Stagger the dates so the business still runs each day.

3. When a due date is missed, ask why before reacting. Extend openly for honest causes, agree a short catch-up plan, and record the new date.

4. Create one record per person: training completed, date finished, and any score or sign-off. Record partial completion as partial, honestly.

5. Keep the records in one findable place, correct any mistake openly with the correction visible, and back the file up.

6. Once a month, produce a one-page report — trained, overdue, gaps — and read it for patterns: one training, one shift, one role. Fix the pattern, not just the person.

7. Set a refresher interval for every important training, shortest for rare, critical, and safety tasks. Place refreshers on a calendar now, not when someone remembers.

8. When anything changes — rule, tool, product, or a mistake that reveals a gap — update the training, bump its version, assign the update, and explicitly retire the old way.

9. Once a year, review the whole system against a year of records: keep what works, retire or merge what does not, and build next year's training calendar from the gaps you found.

A Worked Example

Sofia runs a salon with nine staff. Her first year with the system is deliberately plain: assignments live on one shared list, records in one folder, one page per person. In March, her monthly report shows something she would never have spotted from memory — colour-mixing refresher completion is perfect for weekday staff and zero for the two Saturday-only stylists, because every refresher had been scheduled on a Wednesday training morning they never attend. The gap is a scheduling pattern, not two careless people. She moves refreshers to rotate across the week and adds the Saturday pair's dates to the calendar. In June, a colour mistake — a junior stylist mixing against an old shade chart still in a drawer — triggers the event-driven side of the system: Sofia updates the mixing training to name the current chart, bumps it to version 3, assigns the update to all stylists with staggered dates inside two weeks, records each completion, and throws the old chart away in front of the team so the retirement is real. By her annual review, the records tell a calm story: every required training current, two trainings merged because the report showed they overlapped, and next year's calendar built in one afternoon from the gap list. The system did not make Sofia's salon perfect. It made its training visible, provable, and self-correcting — which is all a system has ever promised.

Common Mistakes

- **Assigning training as homework on top of full days.** Training time is work time. Dates people cannot meet teach people to ignore dates.
- **Treating a missed due date as automatic misconduct.** Missed dates are information first. Punishing an honest scheduling failure teaches people to hide gaps.
- **Recording only successes.** A record with no partials, no failures, and no retakes is fiction. Honest records are the only kind worth keeping.

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- **Never reading the report.** Records that are filed but never reviewed are archaeology. The monthly read is where gaps get fixed while they are still small.
- **Reteaching instead of refreshing.** A refresher is a short review and a practice, not the full training again. Long refreshers get skipped; short ones happen.
- **Updating a training without retiring the old way.** Two versions in circulation means two ways of working. Version it, announce it, remove the old one.

Try It

Build the bones of your own Business Training System this week, on paper, for one job only. Choose your most critical job — the one that would go wrong first if you were away. First, write the roster lines for everyone who does that job: name, role, start date. Second, write that role's responsibility paragraph, then list its tasks in order and pick the three tasks that matter most. Third, write a standard for each of those three tasks: what finished looks like, with numbers where you can. Fourth, write one short training for the single most important task — one subject, steps in order, warnings in place — and cold-read test it on someone who has never done the task. Fix every place they hesitate. Fifth, teach it live: explain, show slowly, let them try, watch and correct. Sixth, make the assignments and the records: write who must complete which training by when, and open one record page per person to hold the completions. When all five parts exist for one job — roster, roles and standards, library, assignments, records — you do not have a plan for a system. You have a system, at small scale. Repeat it for the next job, put the monthly report and the refresher dates on your calendar, and let the loop run.

Fortress shares what I learned, not professional advice. General info only, not legal / HR / financial advice.

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