
JB Holland Construction, Inc. – Case Study

The Company

For over 30 years, JB Holland Construction, Inc. headquartered in Decorah, Iowa has provided a wide range of excavating and construction services to customers located throughout the Midwest. Their customers range from federal, state and county organizations to privately held corporations for whom they perform initial site work, utility storm piping and soil stabilization. JB Holland's Safety Director, Penney Neuzil, describes the variety of different projects they are involved with "We could be building four baseball diamonds and a concession stand or a highway; the same operators run equipment of very different sites."

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The Situation

Like most construction services companies in northern climates, JB Holland's business is project-based and seasonally driven. During the peak season (April through November) they employ up to 90 full time heavy equipment operators and an additional smaller staff of mechanics. Given the current high demand for operators, finding and keeping operators with any experience is a real challenge.

To maintain a competitive advantage, equipment operators must be qualified to operate multiple pieces of equipment. JB Holland's goal is to have all 90 operators skilled on every piece of equipment – articulated truck, dozer, scraper, backhoe, motor grader, roller, skid steer, tiller, tractor and disc, etc. The need for training is significant

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The Challenge

- **No Formal Orientation or Career Path** - new operators had no defined path for their development beyond their first few weeks. They did not know when they would receive training on additional equipment, or how their career would proceed. And, new hires were often recent high school graduates, on a job site far from home, alone for the first time and working with strangers.
- **Lack of Consistency** - New operators start on a haul truck. On their first day, an experienced operator / mentor demonstrated how to operate the truck and then the trainee drove the truck while the mentor coached from the jump seat. On the second day, the mentor introduced the pre-use inspection and covered job site incidents / awareness; the trainee drove the truck solo while the mentor stayed in touch via 2-way radio. Consistency was lacking as each mentor passed on his/ her 'best practices' or 'uninformed mistakes.'

JB Holland Construction, Inc. – Case Study

- **Removing Experienced Operators From Productivity** – To meet cross training and versatility goals, experienced operators were being removed from productive equipment.
- **No Trainer Seat In Most Equipment** - ‘how to train’ when the trainer could not sit next to a trainee in the cab.
- **Job Site Foremen Not Responsible for Training** – foremen with responsibility for the safety and productivity of 5-25 onsite operators were not involved in training or evaluation of new hires or the skills upgrading of experienced operators.
- **Lack of Training Materials** – JB Holland did not have a dedicated staff to create training programs.
- **Costly Downtime** - when operators experienced inevitable downtime due to inclement weather or during the off-season and actually had time for training, there was no effective way to deliver training on the job site, in their hotel rooms, or directly to their homes.

Consequences

- **Retention Issues** – Valued, experienced operators and new hires were leaving at the end of the season and not returning resulting in increased costs to re-recruit, onboard and train replacements.
- **Increase in Recordable Injuries** – a large population of inexperienced operators increases risk. Any such increase would significantly impact the organization’s safety record and limit opportunities to enter into the bidding process on future projects.
- **Decrease in productivity / higher costs** – this lowers the ability to effectively compete in a bid intensive marketplace.
- **Lack of Training Documentation** – this negatively impacts the ability to bid jobs or comply with regulatory agencies.
- **Increased Maintenance Costs / Losses Due to Equipment Downtime** – this results from inexperienced operators failing to adhere to pre-use inspection and operating guidelines.

The Solution

- Locate online training content - JB Holland selected VISTA to host an e-learning system populated with over 100 VISTA heavy equipment operator training programs available anytime, anywhere to help train new hires and upgrade the skill level of their experienced operators.
- Work with Northwest Iowa Community College to provide books and additional videos.
- Arrange for time on Backhoe, Motor Grader and Skid Steer simulators at another area college.
- Create an instructor-led Orientation Program to include:
 - Fire Safety
 - Lockout / Tagout
 - General Safety / Safety Data Sheets
 - Confined Space
 - Drug Use
 - Introduction to Types of Equipment
 - Incident Reporting
 - Introduce **VISTA online training content** and review these programs:
 - Pre-Use Inspection
 - Introduction to Safety
 - Road Crew Safety

JB Holland Construction, Inc. – Case Study

- Train Mentors (experienced operators) by exposing them to VISTA programs, new Checklists, and a new, more robust assessment / evaluation procedure targeted on skills feedback.
- Purchase computers for the field to deliver online VISTA programs.
- Involve job site foremen in the training of operators by providing them with tools and structured training programs. Enable them to assign training to individual employees and have them complete the final assessment of trainees.

The Results

- The most significant achievements occurred in the recruitment / retention arenas.
 - By offering employees online training, they were more knowledgeable when they were given the opportunity to operate new equipment thus giving employees the ability to move up in job classification and offering higher wages.
 - When recruiting at high school career days, JB Holland has a compelling story to share about how they train and develop new hires by helping acquire marketable skills, while ensuring they operate in a safe environment.
- JB Holland has lowered their recordable incidents by 70% since inception of VISTA training.
- As a result of online access to VISTA Training’s extensive library of equipment operator training programs that allowed their operators to access training 24/7, equipment operators were able to view available training programs and express interest in upgrading their skills.
- Site foremen were given responsibility and control over equipment operator training and final evaluation. They experienced the programs themselves, assigned operators to take required programs, received reports on progress and test scores and were responsible for final assessments aided by comprehensive checklists.
- New hires were evaluated by their mentors more frequently and consistently (using checklists) resulting in mentors being able to offer in-the-moment remediation.
- VISTA reporting capability enabled JB Holland to include in a comprehensive list of skills / training all equipment operators who would be assigned to any project had completed.

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Next Steps

The results are impressive, but there are additional steps Penney Neuzil, JB Holland’s Safety Director may undertake to improve / enhance their training program:

- Personal financial management assistance for new high school recruits who can gross up to \$70k in their first year
- Accelerate efforts to recruit female and minority equipment operators; currently less than 10% of operators are female and minority
- Upgrade mentor / foreman coaching skills and add a Roller program to online offerings