Take your Operator and Professional Training to the Next Level

By Michel J. Kocurek, Ph.D., Emeritus Professor, Paper Science & Engineering, North Carolina State University

It’s not uncommon now to hear mill managers discussing the challenges they face from the swell of retiring professionals and operators who take valuable knowledge, experience and talent with them out the door. Retirements are increasing the need for education and training options that are carefully selected and implemented, especially so that the training effectively fills newly opened gaps, accelerates the learning process, and contributes to a more technologically advanced modern workforce.

This model of a technologically advanced modern workforce emerged prominently within the global paper industry over the past 30 years or more. The concept places an emphasis on technical training that focuses on both “what happens” and “why things happen,” which is apparently working. According to a major survey conducted by the Jaakko Poyry Group, companies and mills using this approach reported an increase in profitability.

Many mills and companies do well in recognizing this need for integrated education by implementing technical training programs that compliment On the Job (OTJ) and equipment training, although this important objective in training is often overlooked: Modern operators, process engineers, and other professionals should also understand how processes and equipment affect product quality. Operators routinely are trained to run to a target test number, for instance, yet many do not understand the property itself, including the many variables in the mill that affect properties. Operator and professional training should therefore include the effects of processes on product properties and quality to alleviate this gap in knowledge.

When things go wrong in a paper mill, there’s a long-standing tendency to ‘blame the pulp,’ a shortsighted explanation. Ideally, paper mill operators should be able to recognize variations in the raw material (wood) and in both pulping and in papermaking. This bridge to better understanding is possible when managers and training professionals consider options for short courses, online learning or in-mill training for both pulp mill and paper mill operators and professionals, as part of a sustained employee education program.

Pulp mills and paper mills speak different languages. Operators use the term ‘kappaumber’ in the pulp mill and ‘tensile’ in the paper mill, for example. Leveraging educational programs that help operators and managers become more “bilingual” and better understand the “what and why things happen,” is at least one effective remedy in response to the upsurge of retirements, especially taking into account the customers’ important wants and needs for lasting sustainability in the industry.

Operations and training managers who are looking for educational resources for new employees or for seasoned mill workers who need to fill gaps in knowledge or who are taking on new roles should consider TAPPI’s Introduction to Pulp and Paper Technology Course, January 13-16, 2020, which I teach annually in St. Petersburg, Florida. This training helps both technical and non-technical employees and suppliers think on a mill-wide basis and strengthens their overall knowledge of pulp and papermaking processes. The curriculum is comprehensive, and covers everything from the incoming wood and chips, pulp mill operations, chemical recovery, recycling, stock prep, paper machine operations, pulp and paper quality, and environmental topics. This four-day course delivers the most comprehensive
introductory/intermediate overview available in the industry covering today's pulping and papermaking technology.

About Dr. Kocurek
Dr. Michael J. Kocurek is Professor Emeritus of Paper Science and Engineering at North Carolina State University, and a well-known educator in the pulp and paper industry. Dr. Kocurek has taught this content and other pulp and paper courses for 51 years. His industry knowledge is enhanced by his experiences in teaching more than 200 company classroom sessions at more than 150 mills. He is the editor of 11 books, including the recognized Pulp and Paper Manufacture series covering the entire field of pulp and paper. He has authored/co-authored 25 video publications, including the Introduction to Pulp & Paper series. Among his many honors, Dr. Kocurek is a TAPPI Fellow, TAPPI Distinguished Service Award recipient and member of the Paper Industry Hall of Fame.

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